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QUAKE III ARENA





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REVIEWS

QUAKE III ARENA

Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned, rocket-jumping veteran, Quake III Arena™ is going to push your skills to the limit. Q3A is powered by the most advanced 3D engine ever, and it features 30 challenging maps that show off the intensely realistic, organic look of the Arena. But don't get caught staring at the scenery, or you'll end up as part of it.

Quake is known for the intensity of the Fragmatch, and this time not even the single-player gamers are safe. Q3A's single player game IS a Fragmatch. The computer opponents are armed with highly advanced artificial intelligence and whatever they steal from your fragged remains. These aren't the predictable, learn-how-to-kill-them-once-and-move-on bots you remember. They learn from their mistakes and get better as the game goes on. Let's hope you can say the same.



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PC GAMER

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Half-Life: THE NEXT WAVE p.49

Cover Story

49 Eager to hear more about *Team*

Fortress 2? No problem, we got it right here. Keen to check out *Opposing Force* and get a step-by-step playing guide? We got you covered on page 166! Dying for news on *Half-Life 2*? We can accommodate you. Interested in some of the hottest mods and conversions for *Half-Life*? You've come to the right place. Well, what are you waiting for? Dive in!

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Roleplaying Apocalypse

61 The resurgence of the roleplaying genre shows no signs of slowing down. With hot titles like *Dungeon Siege* and *Baldur's Gate II* on the way, this should be another great year for roleplaying fans. And we've got 'em all!

Cover Illustration by Dhabith Eng, Valve Software

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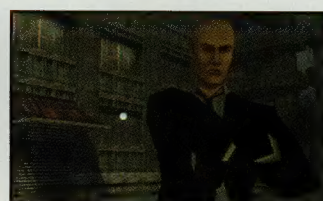
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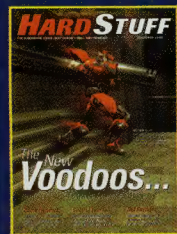


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LucasArts' Tim Schafer is
the latest developer blind-
folded and put up against
our bullet-scorched wall.

Letter from the Ed.



I'm so sorry, he's from Barcelona.

It's been a year since the classic
Half-Life arrived on the scene to
forever redefine action gaming, but
sometimes it still seems like it was
only yesterday. Particularly this
month, as the *PC Gamer* crew
found itself fully re-immersed in
Valve's groundbreaking game via a
whole glut of amazing new *Half-
Life* follow-ups and add-ons. Even
Jay the Jackal, our resident *Team
Fortress* maven, was seen to visi-
bly brighten his demeanor as he
surveyed the Gaming Goodness
soon to be headed his way in the
form of *TF2*. "Excellent," he cack-
led, "even more opportunities for
me to terminate the putrid scum
with whom I am forced to share
my personal space on a daily
basis." Whaddaguy!

Okay, so Mark Pezzetta from
Fair Lawn, NJ, wins a copy of
Homeworld for being the first per-
son to E-mail me with the correct
source of last month's headline
quote — it was, as so many of you
subsequently guessed, from *The
Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

This month I'm giving away a
copy of *Unreal Tournament* to the
first person to E-mail me at
gary@pcgamer.com with the
source of this month's headline
(above). And let me give you a
hint...if you're E-mailing me after
the 10th of the month, forget it...
someone already got there first,
believe me. Good luck....

Gary Whitta
Gary Whitta, Editor-in-Chief

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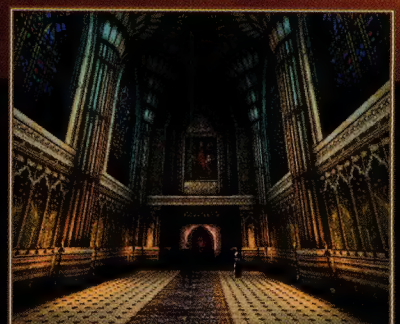
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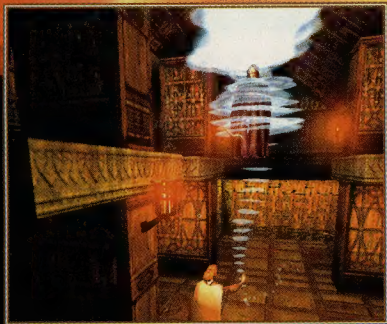
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The logo for the video game "NASCAR Racing 3". It features the word "NASCAR" in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a blue outline, set against a background of vertical stripes in yellow, red, and blue. To the right of "NASCAR" is a large, stylized number "3" in a yellow, 3D font with a red outline. Below the "NASCAR" text, the word "Racing" is written in a cursive, yellow font with a red outline.

A green and red NASCAR race car, number 14, is shown driving on a track. The car features the Mobil 1 logo and the number 14 prominently. It is a Ford Taurus model. The background is a blurred racetrack with a white line.

An aerial photograph of a NASCAR race on a dirt track. Several cars are visible, including a prominent white and black number 14 car in the center, a yellow number 15 car on the right, and a blue and red number 14 car on the left. The track is surrounded by a grassy field and a line of trees in the background.



PLAY THAT FUNKY DEMO, WHITE BOY!

IT'S THE GRIMIEST, SLIMIEST, FUNKIEST CD IN PC GAMER HISTORY. WE BE BAD!

We've been on the lookout for the freshest demos around, in the endless quest for your gaming enjoyment. We understand that you don't have time to sift through the silt to find diamonds, so we've done all the work for you. Whip it as *Indiana Jones*, be the first to experience zombie mayhem in the debut of *They Hunger*, and fire a three-pointer as any member of *PC Gamer* in our custom cut of *NBA Live 2000*. Best of all, for all you loony old schoolers, we've scored an incredible *Bugs Bunny* adventure. We've arranged this month's gems on a silver platter.

To enjoy the demos, just slide *The CD* into your CD-ROM drive and wait for the handsome new interface to appear. Choose a game, read the README, and launch the install. It's that simple.

Unfortunately, we can't provide technical support for the games contained on the disc. However, if the disc itself is scratched or defective, you can order a replacement from <http://support.imaginemediamedia.com>.

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FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE PC GAMER CD

SUPPORT

Click here to connect directly to <http://support.imaginemediamedia.com> for CD support.

ADD-ONS

Try these add-ons for the latest games, including new levels and maps.

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Click here for a list of the utility programs included on the current CD.

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Curious about past demos or reviews in the magazine? Check here for answers.

PC GAMER CD

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Add-Ons

Database

Exit

Utilities

Support

Coconut Monkey

COCONUT MONKEY

What's that crazy Coconut Monkey up to nowadays? Find out by clicking here for Fan Art, Coconut Monkey's web site, and more!

THE README

View and Print the readme file for the selected demo. The Readme file usually contains technical information, control keys, and more.

THE DEMOS

Quickly and easily jump to the demo of your choice. Move the mouse over the picture to see a drop-down description of the demo, and click the picture to go directly there.

INSTALL

When you're ready to install the displayed demo, click this button to launch the setup program. It might help to close the interface at this time.

INSTALL NOW

Indiana Jones & The Infernal Machine

Click Support support.imaginemediamedia.com

System Requirements: Pentium 233/33MHz RAM, DirectX 6.1

Other Demos:



PC GAMER

gamestop.com

PC GAMER

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

- ◆ **INSTALL:** IndianaJones\Indydemo.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** support.lucasarts.com
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Adventure
- ◆ **COMPANY:** LucasArts
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

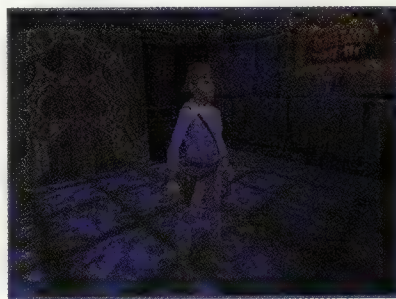
There once lived a spirited young filmmaker with a fondness for James Bond films. Coming to terms with the possibility that he'd never have a chance to direct his own 007 blockbuster, he set about writing something even better. That was twenty years ago, and that man was George Lucas.

Now, ten years since the release of *The Last Crusade*, and after a number of point-and-click adventure games, Indy is finally back in the third dimension. In *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine*, he must foil a Communist plot to take over the world. Long-time fans will know that our whip-snapping, thrill-seeking professor of archaeology is right at home with this task.

The demo comes with a help file that you should definitely glance over before playing. Besides getting a taste for the story, you'll learn some useful keystrokes. In order to use your whip to

swing from something, you must first hold down zero (0) on the numeric keypad and aim at the target. This is awkward at first, but keep at it.

Also, don't be confused by the order of events here. LucasArts tells us that the demo is a smattering of segments from different levels in the full game. You'll practice your puzzle-solving skills, dive into an underground lake, and even drive a Jeep. It's more fun than you can shake a cat at. Just watch out for the snakes.



Here's Indiana Jones, equipped with whip and pistol, looking dapper as ever. Damn he's good.

WHEEL OF TIME

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \Wot\Wotdemo.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** www.gtisonline.com
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Action/Adventure
- ◆ **COMPANY:** GT Interactive
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 266, 64MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

Even if, like me, you have not yet read Robert Jordan's fantasy series *Wheel of Time*, this game still may spark your interest. The story is involving and, architecturally, it is the most impressive use of the *Unreal* engine to date.

Once you install the demo, make sure your video mode is set to the appropriate setting. Then head into the



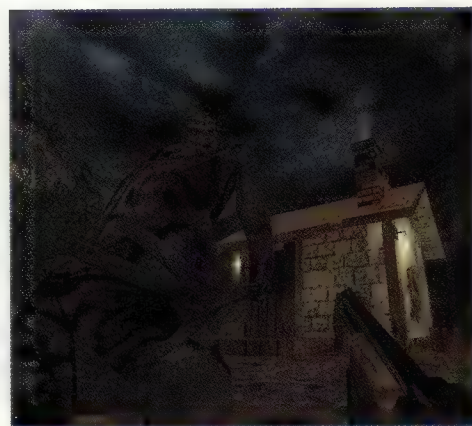
Don't ask me what's going on in this shot. Personally, I don't think this picture is suitable for our younger audience.

game. You'll be taken to a screen custom-written for the demo (we love games that do this), so don't go smashing keys until it goes away. It will explain what's going on.

Basically, you can play through two single-player chapters from the full version as well as engage on one death-match multiplayer map. Walk over to the desk before continuing onward to learn some important keys and functions.

The Streets of Shadar Logeth are down the hallway to your left, and to your right is the Whitecloak Forest. Straight ahead, across the hallway, is the multiplayer arena. Don't be put off by the locked door to the right. There is a key in the room at the other end of the hallway.

You'll find that this game is a part of a healthy trend in first-person shooters in that smart, stealthy play is rewarded. You play a frail magic user, and are vulnerable to sword-slashing. If you try to attack a guard head-on, he will likely deflect your spell with his shield, sending it back into your face. Try a quieter, sneakier approach, and you'll have more success.



He has no head, but he still thirsts for blood. Go figure. All we know is that this new level set is damn scary.

PC GAMER PRESENTS:

THEY HUNGER



- ◆ **INSTALL:** \TheyHunger\Hunger.zip
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** www.planethalf-life.com/manke
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Half-Life level set
- ◆ **COMPANY:** Neil Manke
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Half-Life, Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

From the Canadian madman who brought us *USS Darkstar*, the highly successful and unrelenting level set for *Half-Life*, comes a horrifying tale of the undead and their insatiable thirst for blood.

Level God Neil Manke has outdone himself. Instead of using default graphics from *Half-Life*, he has scanned and finished hundreds of his own textures to create a completely unique setting. Look for new monster skins as well as new weapons, all set in a diverse outdoor environment.

You must have *Half-Life* version 1.0.0.9 to run this level set. To install, just unzip the contents of the pack into a new folder called "Hunger" in your *Half-Life* folder. Then run *Half-Life*, choose "Custom Game" from the main menu, and activate *They Hunger*.

Set sometime in the mid-eighties, around the time Intel introduced the 80386 chip, a remote town is about to experience the unthinkable: a zombie invasion. No one knows what causes the strange events to unfold, but a radio announcer keeps the player apprised of the situation through warnings in his station breaks. "Stay indoors," he suggests. But surely curiosity is too strong an animal for *PC Gamer* readers, and we will get to the bottom of the mystery, even if it means having the doodle scared out of us.

To that end, we recommend playing this level set with the lights dimmed down low. In fact, turn them off. Wait until no one is home, light a candle, and boot up *Half-Life*. The game is designed to look right on a dim contract setting, so configure your monitor accordingly. If an area of the map is pitch dark, your monitor should be too.



Bob is a defenseless little angel in a diaper...until he possesses a guard with a machine gun.

MESSIAH

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \Messiah\Messiah.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** (949) 553-6678
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Action
- ◆ **COMPANY:** Interplay
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 250MB hard-drive space, DirectX 7

This one has created a real buzz in the industry over the technology behind the engine. In fact, this is not an official demo but a technology test, though quite a solid one at that.

The game is capable of dynamic level of detail (LOD, for you buzzword linguists) that purports to be way ahead of the competition. When you get a look at the characters in the game, it may become clear why. Each person can have as many as 2,000 polygons at one given time, and a close-up reveals curves and details unlike anything else.

You play an angel sent from God to clean up the world. The demo opens with an introduction describing your goal (to settle a riot, no less). Once you possess the guard, trot up the ramp to find the mechanic fellow working on the crate. Possess him, and use the action key on the crate. It will explode. You'll be well on your way to benevolence.

NBA LIVE 2000

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \NBAlive\Nballive2k.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** www.ea.com/tech_support
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Sports
- ◆ **COMPANY:** EA Sports
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

Is the NBA Live franchise ready for the new millennium? Surely with the elite *PC Gamer* All-Stars it stands a great chance. Oh yes, people — thanks to the work of the good people at EA, you can play as your favorite *PC Gamer* staff member.

All jokes aside, that's not necessarily a good thing. You can also play as the more established New York Knicks or the San Antonio Spurs. But if you want to enable our funky mugs, here's how to do it. First of all, boot up the game using "NBA D3D" if you're running a 3D accelerator. In the Away team box, slide the bar from the New York



Dean Renninger and Greg Vederman ponder their purpose in this game. They decide to look as silly as possible.

Knicks to the *PC Gamer* All Stars. Make sure the game is set to Exhibition Mode, hit the checkmark, and get it done!

If you're on the opposing team, and Greg Vederman is playing a little too rough for you, you can also play against Michael Jordan one-on-one.

URBAN CHAOS

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \UrbanChaos\Urbandemo.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** www.eidosinteractive.com/help.html
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Action
- ◆ **COMPANY:** Eidos
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, 3D Accelerator, DirectX 7

You are Darci Stern, a police agent who loves her job. That is, she loves sticking it to the bad guys any way she can, at all costs — even if it means stunting their criminal lives. In this demo, she must rescue construction workers who have been taken hostage and eliminate any opposition.

This is an interesting title that is part shooter, part adventure, and part fighting game. When the opening cinematic begins, take a close look at the path the camera follows. It will lead you to your goal. If you don't pay attention, you may get lost because the city is open-ended and there are a number of dead ends.

Take a look at the keys in the setup menu. They are simple, but good to know. Also, try some combo moves like the Hitting Kick while running to slide and trip your opponents, or kicking while in the air for a flying boot to the head. I'm telling you, Darci is one tough lady. She must have a good coach.



Darci can jump over fences quite easily. Do whatever it takes to save the hostages!

BUGS BUNNY: LOST IN TIME

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \Bugs\Bblitdemo.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** www.infogrames.net/support
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Action
- ◆ **COMPANY:** Infogrames
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 16MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

Everyone's favorite rascally rabbit is back in his first 3D adventure! And, before you turn the page and overlook this gem of a game, allow me to let you in on a secret. It's fun.

Yes, this could be the sleeper hit of the decade, folks. Or, at least the month. It is a truly humorous game that looks and feels exactly like an interactive Looney Tunes cartoon, complete with randomly falling anvils.



He's the man with a lisp and a shotgun, and he's no match for one rascally rabbit.

The graphics support either software or 3D accelerated modes, and the demo itself gives you about three levels of play from the full version. Play with a

gamepad if you have one. Otherwise, take a look at the README for the keys because there are a few of them.

Now, go stick it to Elmer.

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

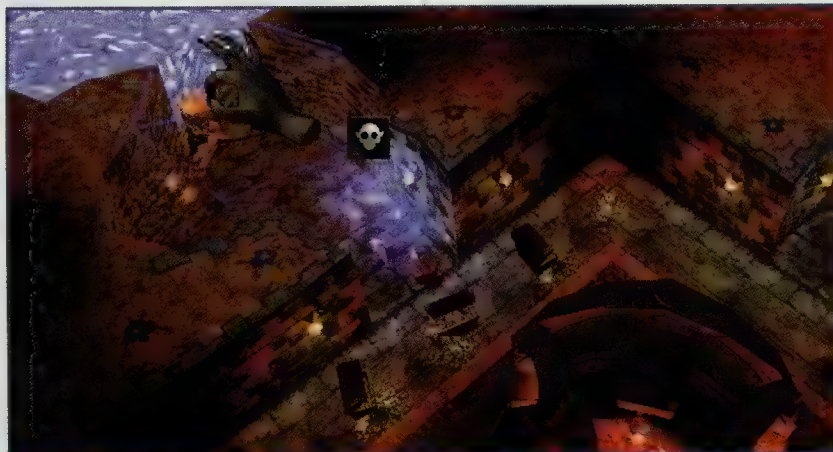
- ◆ **INSTALL:** \Dk2\DungeonKeeper2Demo.exe
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** www.ea.com/tech_support
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Strategy
- ◆ **COMPANY:** Electronic Arts
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233 MMX, 64MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

In this amoral title from Electronic Arts and Bullfrog, the player is the bad guy. In case you didn't play the original, it was simply incredible. This sequel manages to improve upon its greatness, especially in the graphics department.

This demo is limited only to multi-player only, up to four players, via LAN

and Internet. Searching for a game on the 'net is a cinch. Just boot up the game and click on "Internet Dungeon Watch." You'll be presented with a list of games. Look for ones colored white. Choose one, and you're good. Or evil, as the case may be.

Basically, your task is to create an army of dungeon crawlers and, above all, defend your dungeon heart. As long as you keep your minions happy, they will carry out their pitiful lives and duties without much intervention. Check the README for key assignments.



Highlight sections of rock to tunnel through them, and protect your dungeon heart at all costs.

EARTHLINK

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \ELINK\SETUP.EXE
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** (800) 395-8410
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Online service
- ◆ **COMPANY:** EarthLink
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** 486, 8MB RAM, 15MB hard-drive space, SVGA, Windows 3.1 or higher, 9600bps modem

EarthLink Network, winner of the 1997 *PC Magazine* Editors' Choice Award for Best Internet Service Provider, supports all kinds of Internet games and even has its own online gaming site (www.thearena.com). EarthLink membership includes unlimited Internet access, unlimited E-mail, a free 6MB of space for your own web site, a free subscription to *bLink*, EarthLink's newsletter, a fully customizable Personal Start page, and your choice of browser.

EarthLink is renowned for its 24/7, around-the-clock superior custom service and tech support, so if you find yourself with questions, rest assured that EarthLink will have a friendly representative standing by to help you out.

To get you started, EarthLink offers *PC Gamer* readers a 15-day free trial, plus free setup (a savings of \$25!). After that, you'll be billed \$19.95 a month unless you cancel.

Take that exceptional value, toss in bundles of local access numbers and

Getting the Most Out of EarthLink

An Introduction for New Internet Users

Web Version 2.0

By Sky Dayton
Founder and Chairman, EarthLink Network, Inc.

EarthLink offers a virtual plethora of online support features, and it's all only a click away.

loads and loads of cool features, and EarthLink is presenting one opportunity that you can't afford to pass up.

So what are you waiting for? Fire up that modem, load up the goodies, and get ready to start surfing the Internet EarthLink style!

MIND-SPRING

- ◆ **INSTALL:** \MSPRING\SETUP.EXE
- ◆ **TECH SUPPORT:** (800) 719-4660
- ◆ **CATEGORY:** Online service
- ◆ **COMPANY:** MindSpring
- ◆ **REQUIRED:** 486, 8MB RAM, 25MB hard-drive space, SVGA, Windows 3.1+, 14.4Kbps or faster modem

MindSpring will launch you onto the Internet with all sorts of goodies at your disposal — use E-mail and the World Wide Web, read Usenet newsgroups, and even gain access to free news, stock information, and web support.

The pricing is competitive, too: The Light service gives you five hours of service a month for \$6.95 and additional hours for \$2 each, along with 5MB of web space for your own web page. The Standard plan is \$14.95 a month for 20 hours, with each additional hour costing \$1. You also get 5MB of web space with this one. The Unlimited service gives you unlimited hours for \$19.95 a month along with web space, and The Works service gives you unlimited hours, along with two extra E-mail boxes and 10MB of web space, for \$26.95 a month!

MindSpring uses its Pipeline+ software to give Windows 95 users a direct TCP/IP connection to the Internet, using the Microsoft Dial-Up Adapter. That means any of those online games that require a TCP/IP connection will work beautifully with MindSpring. If you use Windows 3.1, MindSpring uses Connect rather than the Dial-Up Adapter, which gives you a 16-bit TCP/IP connection, so you can still play those online games (as long as they don't require a 32-bit connection). For the online gamer, MindSpring offers all you need to start fragging your friends!

With its affordable pricing and a whole slew of services available, MindSpring is a good starting point for getting onto the Internet. Best of all, if you install the software from *The PC Gamer* CD, the \$25 launching fee will be waived. Talk about service!

HAVING PROBLEMS?

We cannot provide technical support for problems you may encounter with demos on *The CD*. Please use the tech support numbers listed with the demos. You can also go to www.pcgamer.com/cd-rom.html on the Internet for a FAQ and other info.

The CD is rigorously tested by the *PC Gamer* staff and certified virus-free. *PC Gamer* cannot be held responsible for any incompatibility problems caused by the use of *The CD*. However, should your copy fail to run, with error messages that indicate your CD drive cannot read the disc, return it to the following address: Customer Service, Imagine Media, The PC Gamer Feb. 2000 Disc 5.5 Replacement, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005, or go to <http://support.imagemedia.com> for more info.

MESSIAH



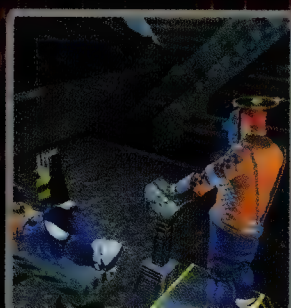
PROBLEM:

How does a pudgy Messiah with only a diaper for defense find out the source of evil on earth?



SOLUTION:

Possession... Naked and defenseless, Bob uses his only weapon and takes possession of the first character he sees, a worker.



Bob, recognizable by the halo, realizes that the worker does not have security access to leave the room. So to cause a commotion, "Bob" lowers a 5-ton tank on unsuspecting worker.



Then he can possess the medic sent in to aid the crushed worker, medics have security access.



Now through a warehouse door, Bob still needs access to the lab where he believes he'll find some answers.



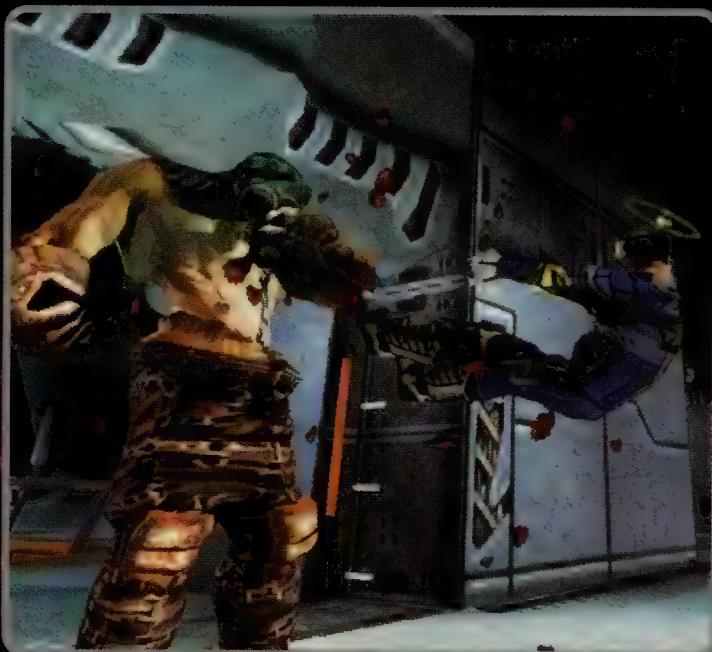
Dumping the medic's body, Bob realizes that Cops have access to the lab.



Cops also have laser sighted GUNS! How heavenly!



While being scanned at the door Bob attracts some unwanted attention.



After seeing the awesome power displayed by the behemoth, who needs a cop. Bob takes possession of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!

The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tosses his lifeless body across the room.



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Deus Ex

Warren Spector's conspiracy theory is quickly coming true



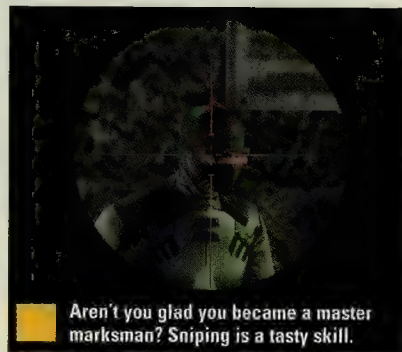
A superb new real-time lip-syncing technology will take sound cues straight into the *Unreal* engine and output the results as lip-synced speech within the game engine. That means there will be no more flapping mouths; these characters will speak with accurate lip movements.

It's a future so close you can pretty much call it home. Nanotechnology has enabled powerful human augmentations. Domestic terrorists battle super-secret government organizations in the streets of major American cities. And history's most-whispered rumors are turning out to be terrifyingly accurate.

Deus Ex is the much-anticipated new creation from Warren Spector, who has been quietly preparing what may well turn out to be ION Storm's real breakthrough game. Its genre-bending gameplay and use of the *Unreal* engine have made it a bright spot on our editorial radar for some time now, and with our most recent look at the game, the justification for excitement is even greater. "There's a lot of talk about the 'next generation of RPGs,' but that's not the way I'm looking at this game at all," says Spector. "I want to do something that's totally different."

While its basis is in roleplaying, *Deus Ex* could be described by someone else as a first-person shooter, and they'd both be right. The game begins with character creation, in which you customize your rookie agent for UNATCO, a United Nations anti-terrorist group. You'll input a character's name and choose a model; then you'll define your characteristics from a skills list. Spector spent a lot of time tailoring a simple, relevant skills set that would immediately and accurately specify what your character can do. "My mother could look at this and make sense of it," he says. "Every decision you make in character creation is driving differences in gameplay."

For example: there are only a dozen or so skills, and no vague percentage rating for each. You are either Unskilled, Trained, Advanced, or a Master in any given skill. If you are Unskilled in marksmanship, then when you set up a sniper shot through a telescopic scope, you'll



Aren't you glad you became a master marksman? Sniping is a tasty skill.

find things shaking and bouncing, and it'll be hard to hit anything. If you're Trained, the shot will be steadier and you'll have a chance. If you've invested points in becoming a Master marksman, you'll find the shot dead steady and it will be a challenge to miss. "So many games keep secrets from players," says

EVI

CATEGORY: Roleplaying

DEVELOPER: ION Storm

PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive,
(415) 538-0999, www.eidos.com

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%

RELEASE DATE: Summer

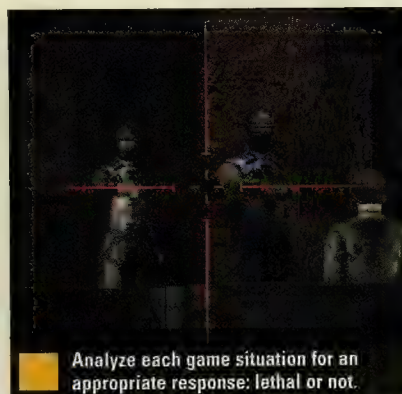
IN A NUTSHELL: A hybrid-genre action/RPG set in a chaotic near future where government conspiracies could spell your hero's demise. Fight through real-world locations or take a stealthier route to uncover the mysteries behind tomorrow's headlines. Its designers are reluctant to describe it as being a part of any genre, it being such a new twist on all of them.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? Top-notch technology, including the *Unreal* engine and a revolutionary new voice-syncing utility, will help realize the design vision of Game God Warren Spector, renowned for his deep, rich storylines and immersive RPG work. The fact that its bizarre, conspiracy-laden plot is drawn largely from actual theories makes it all the more fun.

Spector. "With us, you'll know exactly what capabilities your skills give you."

Be careful how you create your character, though, because the choices you make will determine how the game will be played. It's Spector's desire to create a game that can be played in almost any way: if you're a shooter fan, it'll be possible to clear each mission by wasting all the opposition (though you'll miss a lot of clues and interactions that will make the game easier to solve), or you can conquer the same challenge without killing a soul (the way Spector likes to play it). You can be sneaky, hack computers to bypass security, stun people with a stun-gun, or annihilate them with bullets; it's really up to you.

What doesn't change is the linear storyline that takes you from graduation as a humble new agent to the depths of an international conspiracy. The game takes place in the gritty



Analyze each game situation for an appropriate response: lethal or not.

"My mother could look at this and make sense of it. Every decision you make in character creation is driving differences in gameplay."

—WARREN SPECTOR, DESIGNER

urban environments of the near future, a change of pace from Spector's background in fantasy RPGs. "I was trying to get away from elves and dwarves and orcs," he says. "It's all about people, all about the things they build, and the things they do to each other."

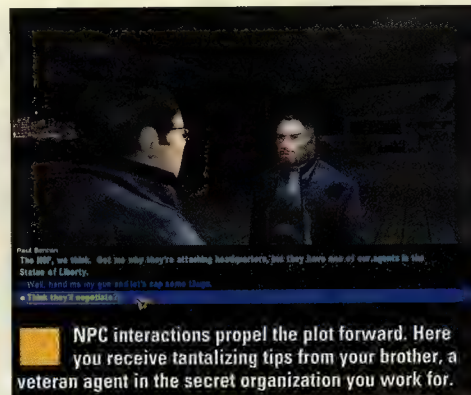
Real-world locations have been modeled in the *Unreal* engine to create environments you could very well recognize. Among

them will be Liberty Island and its dockside, the New York war memorial, and a stretch of super-claustrophobic Hong Kong.

The plot is kicked off by your assignment to take on a terrorist cell that poses a threat to the ultra-se-

crete UNATCO. Your brother, a veteran agent for the organization, drops some strange hints that your superiors are not what they seem. But it's no secret to tell you that *nothing* is what it seems in this game — as you progress, you'll unravel a string of conspiracy theories drawn from today's darkest headlines (including an important plot point involving an artificial intelligence that tracks and controls all Internet communications, a seemingly ludicrous plot device that got a boost of realism by recent headlines about the National Security Agency's secret Echelon communication-monitoring project). "It's bizarre," says Spector. "Stuff we put in thinking 'no one will believe this' becomes news a bit later."

This twisting plot will be unveiled through conversations with NPCs that use real-time voice-syncing technology. As characters speak, the graphics engine converts their voices into the seven major phonemes (shapes the



NPC interactions propel the plot forward. Here you receive tantalizing tips from your brother, a veteran agent in the secret organization you work for.

human mouth takes to process sounds). The result is real-time conversations with mouths that don't just open and close — characters' lips will be synced almost perfectly with their voices.

These will largely be binary conversations, offering only two real directions in which to proceed. This is being done both to simplify the plot and also to help clearly steer you in the gameplay direction you want to go. Faced with a choice between asking someone "Is there a way to sneak in there?" or "I'll just blast my way through the front door," players will know exactly what they're getting into. "I don't want the player to have to take notes," says Spector. "Give him a goal and let him figure out how to execute."

The gameworld is so open and free-form, you'll be able to shoot hoops, play pool in the billiards halls, and even get drunk from alcohol. (In a hilarious bit, you can drink from a bottle and immediately the screen gets fuzzy and your coordination suffers for a bit; you're drunk as a skunk).

This being the future, your character comes complete with an upgradeable augmentation system; fascinatingly, each system is based on a "kernel of truth" from current scientific research. These augmentations can modify the cranium, eyes, legs, arms, or torso, and confer abilities like telescopic vision, bioelectric scanning, self-healing, and subdural body armor.

Computers play a big part in the adventure, as you'll use interfaces throughout the game to accomplish tasks. Hacking will be mandatory, and is dramatized in-game through the use of a "temp bar" that decreases as your time before discovery ticks away. (The better your skill with computers, the more time you'll have in your temp bar.) Hacking is an important skill, since you can use hacks to unlock doors, turn off cameras, and disable gun turrets. Echoes of Spector's classic *System Shock* design are loud here, as you'll have to solve these in-game mini-systems to progress past obstacles.

Deus Ex looked impressive when we saw it a year ago, and it's only getting better as ION Storm nears completion over the final few months. If it stays on course, we just might earmark it as a possible early candidate for Game of the Year.

—Daniel Morris



Real-world environments will immerse you in a believable future. This is the opening scene at New York's Liberty Island, complete with an accurate Big Apple skyline.

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High Heat Baseball 2001

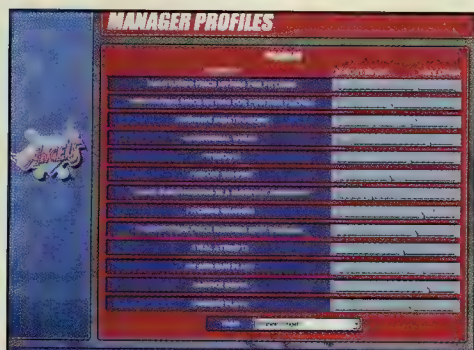
3DO looks to extend its lead in the baseball sim market

Every so often, a game comes around that takes a genre, or a particular subject, to a higher level. For real-time strategy fans, that game was *StarCraft*; for first-person shooter lovers, it was *Half-Life*; for baseball nuts, it most definitely was *High Heat 2000*.

The development team (formerly known as Team .366 but now toiling away under the 3DO banner) built a strong gameplay base with the surprisingly addictive, but bare-bones 1999 version, and upped the ante considerably with last year's ambitious full-featured game. The ambition level may have been a bit too high, however; several bugs slipped through that tarnished an otherwise brilliant product. Two patches were subsequently released, righting many of the wrongs that were present in the shipped version, and the expectations for this next game are way up in the clouds.

The look of *High Heat 2001* will be very familiar to veterans of the series, but with a few notable exceptions. There are now four player models depicting different body types, and they will be scaled to the player's height and weight. Facial textures have also been added for many of the more recognizable major leaguers. It's an improvement over last year's generic player models, but no one is going to mistake the game for the latest EA Sports release.

The stadiums, beautiful as always,



If the CPU manager is not doing what you think he should be doing, just make a few adjustments to his tendencies to get him back on track.



Games will now take place under the stars. Notice the due-up box at the bottom of the screen. This information will also appear in the bullpen screen, making your pitching change decisions easier. A lot of small touches like this should make the game even better this year.

have been given a retexturing, and you'll now be able to play night games. A few problems — such as the incorrect center field dimensions at Fenway Park — have been corrected, and the playing fields will also sport a few animations, such as waving flags, flashing scoreboards, and park-specific features like the fountains at Kauffman Stadium. One change that will also have an effect on gameplay is the addition of a raised pitcher's mound, which will interact with balls hit up the middle. Additional stadiums, both new and old, have been created, and will include Shibe Park and the Baker Bowl (old Philadelphia home fields), Comerica (Detroit) and Miller Park (Milwaukee), among others.

Where the *High Heat* series has earned most of its many accolades is out on the field, and this year's version could be the best yet. The single most important change to the gameplay is how the outfield relay system works. In

the past, factors such as the outfielder's arm strength, his distance from the cut-off man, and his distance from the base he was aiming at all determined whether a throw would be cut off or not — the player had little choice in the matter. To remedy this, *High Heat 2001* will employ an interactive relay system. Now it's up to you whether you want to throw through to try and get the runner. The way it works is simple; the throw will go directly to a base if you hit the throw button while aiming toward that base on the D-pad. If you want to hit the cut-off man, just hit the throw button without choosing a base to throw to.

This small change adds quite a bit of strategy, as Jason Ray, the associate producer, tells us: "As in real life, avoiding the cut-off man can have drastic results," he says. "Your throwing accuracy gets worse with longer distances, increasing the chances of an error or

3DO

CATEGORY: Sports

DEVELOPER: 3DO

PUBLISHER: 3DO, (800) 336-3506,
www.3do.com

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%

RELEASE DATE: March 2000

IN A NUTSHELL: This third entry in the *High Heat* franchise will build on the series' fantastic arcade play with its unmatched pitcher-batter interface, while adding increased depth to the sim side of things. Online play will allow gamers to conduct an entire season over the 'Net. More of everything — stats, animations, camera angles, stadiums, and customization options — is the mantra for the new game.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? *High Heat 2000* recently claimed the distinction of being named *PC Gamer*'s 39th best game of all time; the game managed to appeal to arcade gamers as well as coaching types. This follow-up adds a bundle of improvements and additions in both the arcade play and the managerial options that should ensure this series remains far ahead of the competition for the foreseeable future.



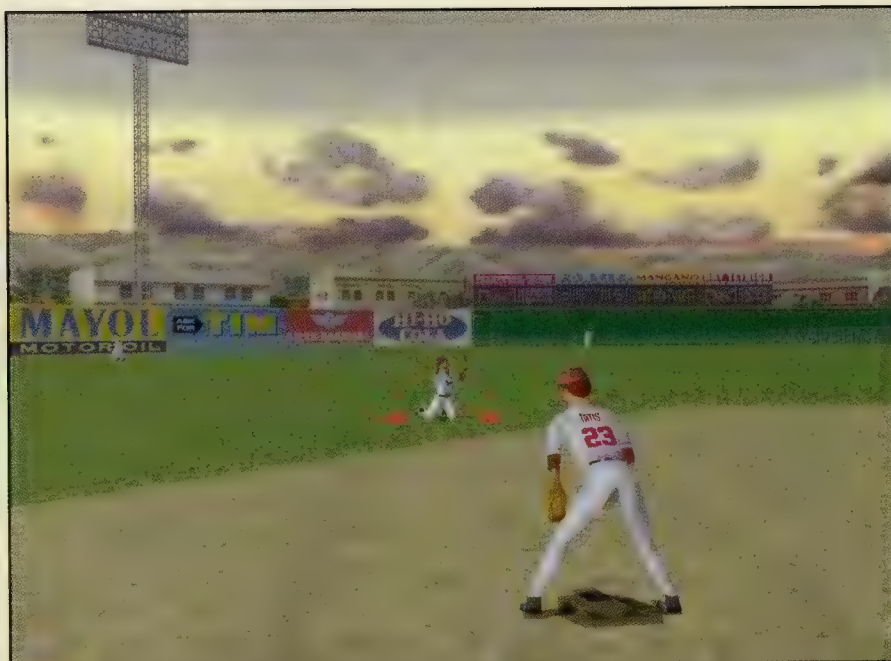
New camera angles, including the optional action camera seen here, should make manage-only games even more exciting.

off-line throw. Secondly, a throw from the warning track to home plate by a rubber-armed outfielder could result in a base runner reaching third base on a line drive single. Our computer runners will certainly capitalize on bad decisions made in the field, so the cut-off man is something users will have to be aware of and use to their advantage."

The computer's base running was a bit of an issue with the game last year. As it turns out, a bug slipped into the code, making the runners unnecessarily conservative. It was somewhat repairable by adjusting some tune file parameters, but trade-offs had to be made. In order to get a runner on second to go to third on a ground ball to the right side of the infield, you had to make them pretty stupid. This resulted in them taking off for third on any ground ball, even if it was hit right in front of them, which allowed the short-stop to make an easy play on the brain-dead runner.

Even in the alpha version of *High Heat 2001* that I've been playing (which should be further improved before the game ships) the difference is quite noticeable. "We have spent a considerable amount of time improving base running," says Executive Director Mark Dickenson. "You will notice the computer-controlled runners being more aggressive. Plus, they will make an occasional base running error."

The other major changes for *High Heat 2001* can be seen when you start up a new league. No longer are you confined to the Major League schedule;



The player animations look better than ever, and there'll be nearly a hundred new ones added in *High Heat 2001*. The player models have also been improved thanks to an increased polygon count.

with the Custom League feature you can create just about any kind of set-up you want. Want to set up a 120-team super-league that has a 119-game schedule? Not a problem. The schedule generator will build in off-days, inter-league play, give you the choice of a balanced or unbalanced schedule (i.e.

more games against your division rivals), and insert the three-day All-Star break in the middle of the season (yes, there will finally be an All-Star Game!). In a career league, you'll also be able to participate in an amateur draft.

"The amateur draft is very similar to the draft option that can be used in creating a season," says Dickenson. "However, it is given as an option at the beginning of any new season in career mode. If you choose to participate, you will be given a list of the new rookies and their scouting profiles. You can then go through a round-by-round draft selection choosing your next crop of rookies."

Giving even more control over certain areas of the game code to the player is another of *High Heat 2001*'s many intriguing aspects. In season play, each team will have a manager profile (a single profile can also be applied to all managers) that can be adjusted for

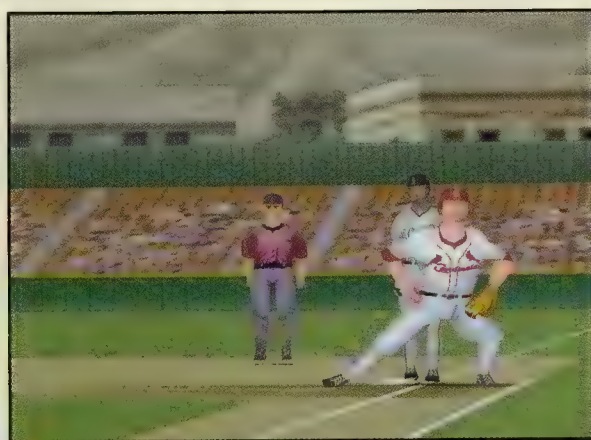
things like pick-off attempts, base-stealing aggressiveness, and personnel decisions (there are 13 in all). The tune file should have a couple of additions as well: "As of now, we are targeting an error multiplier and ground friction parameter," says Dickenson. "Ground friction is one of the new enhance-

ments; many folks had commented that balls rolled too far and too fast in previous *High Heats*, so we tackled this. Players will often see the ball slow and roll dead in the outfield now."

The issues I've addressed above

should give you a good idea of what to expect for the next iteration of one of sports gaming's best franchises. That's not all there is to look forward to, though: Internet play will now support playoff and league games. You can now save your game at any time. The already excellent box scores are made better by a full game summary that tells you exactly what happened in every at bat. The number of statistical categories that the game keeps track of has been nearly doubled. The new batting practice mode lets you hone your skills against any type of pitcher and against any type of pitch. New player awards have been added, such as Rookie of the Year and best reliever. The game will keep a history of each Hall of Famer's career stats, team accomplishments, and player awards. Most importantly, you'll be able to import your current *High Heat 2000* career league and pick up right where you left off. There are other changes, too, but you get the idea; this is truly baseball gaming taken to the next level.

—Rob Smolka



Mr. McGwire stretches out that tight hamstring between pitches. Notice the difference in body size between the beefy Big Mac and the svelte speedster standing on first.

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Rogue Spear: Urban Operations

The Rainbow team is takin' it to the streets

Tango down!" If you're a *Rainbow Six* fan, those very words, quietly uttered by one of your teammates after he's eliminated yet another scummy terrorist, probably cause your spine to tingle with excitement. Well, get set for that tingle to return, because *Red Storm* is getting ready to grace us with *Urban Operations*, an expansion pack for *Rogue Spear*, the very successful sequel to *Rainbow Six*.

Urban Operations' premise will be familiar to veterans of the series: Terrorists are up to no good again, and the task of taking them down falls to the covert Rainbow team. This mission pack will take your elite team into brand new settings, however; as the title implies, most of the missions (five are planned for now) will take place in populated cities all over the world, such as Hong Kong, Cairo, and Mexico City. This brings a whole new twist to the game: innocent civilians.

Sure, you already have some experience with having to avoid killing innocents, but only in the form of hostages whose presence you were already aware of. Innocent bystanders roaming the streets are a whole new ball of wax; they're random, and as such, harder to plan for. Steve Cotton, the mission pack's producer, says, "When the bystanders hear gunfire and start fleeing for cover, you'll have to avoid hitting them when trying to take down a tango...or just be smarter about getting to your goal. It's a new element you'll have to think about."

There's more to *Urban Operations* than buildings and bystanders. As with most mission packs, this one contains a cornucopia of fresh gameplay in the form of creative level design, snazzy new weapons, and enhanced AI.

Cotton tells us about one of the more interesting levels: "Terrorists have smashed a bus into the front of a hotel lobby in Hong Kong as a diversion to a kidnapping," he says. "They are holed up in the bus and the hotel, and you have to storm the hotel through the crashed bus!"

The Rainbow team's enhanced arsenal may help in such volatile situations, and it will definitely spice up the already engrossing multiplayer elements. "Rainbow will have the use of medium machine guns this time," says Cotton.

"The HK21E, SAW, and RPD are in there right now. My personal favorite is the SAW with a 200-round clip. There's nothing more satisfying than laying waste to a row of shops while trying to tag someone in a multiplayer game. We're also adding proximity mines to multiplayer — essentially C4 charges with proximity sensors."

Don't think that the newfound explosiveness is limited to multiplayer, either; computer-controlled terrorists will be deadlier than ever, now that they've been bestowed with the ability to toss grenades. "This really comes in handy (no pun intended) in the new game type called 'defend' in which the terrorists are coming after you! No more just sitting around a corner waiting for them, because now there may be a grenade with your name on it on its way," says Cotton. He contin-

ues (proving he has a sense of humor), "Other [new terrorist] skills include walking, shooting, and sometimes even finding a spot on the wall that's so interesting they just need to stare at it a few minutes while running at full speed (whoops, that's an old skill)."

Modifying the game — a popular pastime, judging from the number of user-created levels and mods on the Internet — will be easier than ever. *Red Storm* is building mod support right into the game interface, so there's no need to master cryptic command lines to launch modified games. "It's amazing what gamers have already done with our game, and now it's easier," says Cotton.

Even if you're not interested in mods, the mission pack can also extend gameplay by creating customized missions for you. "You can dynamically set up the mission you want to play by choosing game type, map, difficulty, number of terrorists, etc.," says Cotton. "This is separate from the campaign structure and acts much like the random map functionality found in many real-time strategy games." Other extras include the five most popular *Rainbow Six* levels, complete with all the graphical enhancements of the *Rogue Spear* engine.

Urban Operations looks like it's going to be a mission pack worth its weight in shell casings, and is sure to please even the most discriminating counter-terrorists.

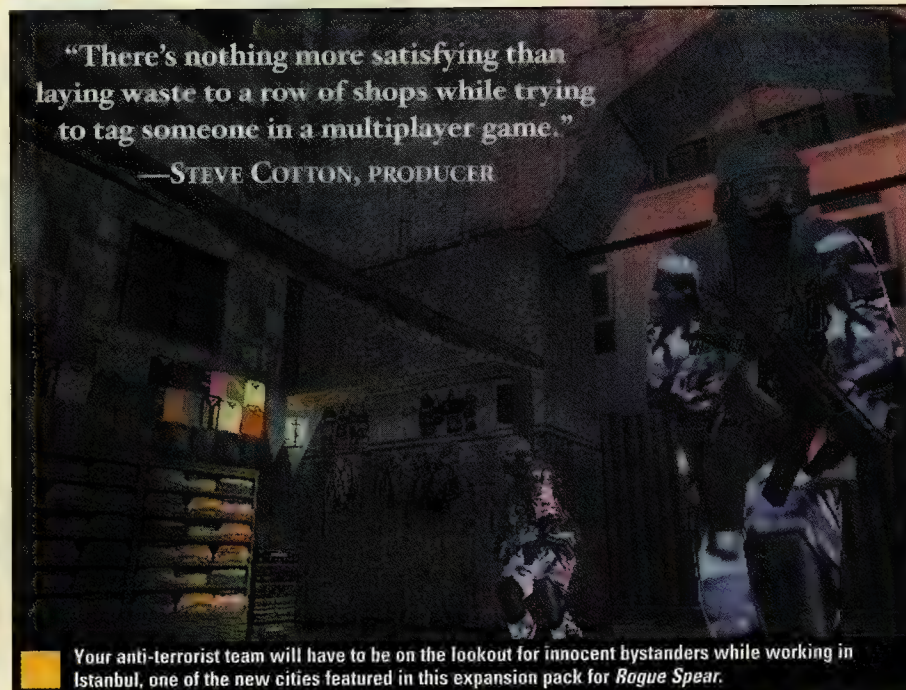
—Joel Durham, Jr.



Urban Operations will have a mission generator to further extend the game.

"There's nothing more satisfying than laying waste to a row of shops while trying to tag someone in a multiplayer game."

—STEVE COTTON, PRODUCER



Your anti-terrorist team will have to be on the lookout for innocent bystanders while working in Istanbul, one of the new cities featured in this expansion pack for *Rogue Spear*.

E.V.I.

CATEGORY: Action/Strategy

DEVELOPER: Red Storm

PUBLISHER: Red Storm,
(919) 460-1776, www.redstorm.com

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 40%

RELEASE DATE: April

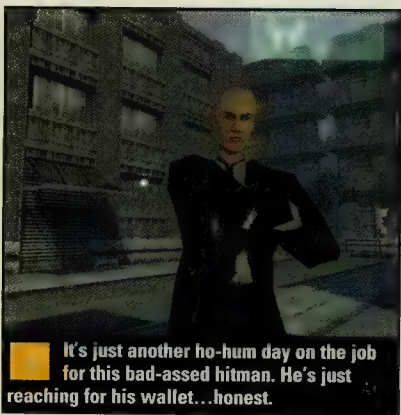
Hitman

Eidos sets out to give every gamer a chance to be Chow-Yun Fat for a day

IO Interactive is looking to make a big impression on the games industry with its first release, *Hitman*. Set in the present day, *Hitman* is a 3D action-adventure game that plans to inject some fresh blood in an already overcrowded genre. Played from multiple 3D camera angles, the player controls — you guessed it — a hitman through five different chapters divided into individual missions. Each chapter takes place in a new geographical location, ranging from Hong Kong to South America.

Before each mission, the player is briefed on his objective and chooses his load-out. The weapons list is impressive, containing everything from Uzis to blow-guns, a sniper rifle, an M16, C4, and even piano wire. As the missions progress, you learn more and more about yourself and the people who employ your talents. Expect the usual twists and turns in the plot as you dig deeper into the story.

Every mission is open-ended and set up to be as non-linear as possible. If you have to go kill someone in a park, for instance, you can decide to go in John Woo-style with guns blazing, or you can take to the roofs and get in a long-range kill with your sniper rifle. Of course, a less conspicuous approach is usually better. Producer Eric Adams, talking about another of the game's missions, describes it best. "Quiet kills are preferred," he says, "so you may want to wear a disguise, sneak into the men's



It's just another ho-hum day on the job for this bad-assed hitman. He's just reaching for his wallet...honest.

EVI

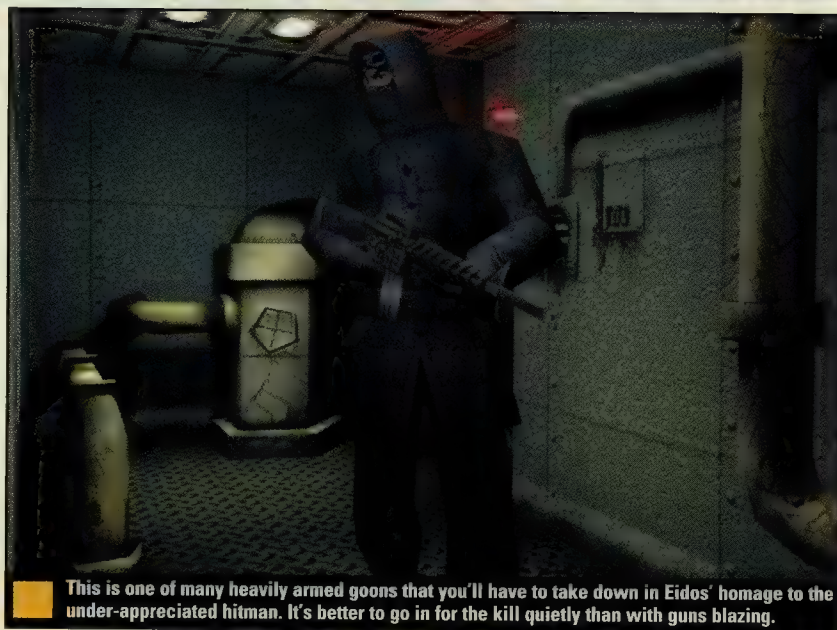
CATEGORY: Action-Adventure

DEVELOPER: IO Interactive

PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive,
(415) 538-0999, www.eidos.com

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 40%

RELEASE DATE: Spring



This is one of many heavily armed goons that you'll have to take down in Eidos' homage to the under-appreciated hitman. It's better to go in for the kill quietly than with guns blazing.

room, wait for your man to enter, strangle him, place him into the stall, then sneak out the restroom window."

Okay, so far everything is pretty standard fare for an action-adventure game; there are some cool weapons, a compelling concept, and some pretty graphics. So what sets this apart from countless other games out there? Simply put, it's interactivity.

IO Interactive is using what it calls

the Glacier engine, and claims the level of interactivity within the world of *Hitman* to be unlike any other game out there. The engine is capable of incredibly realistic physics — kick a chair, and it'll tip over; kick the same chair at a different spot, and it'll just slide along the floor instead. If you tip a table that has a pot on it, the pot will fall off and shatter. If you shoot a fish tank, water comes flooding out of it. When you walk through the jungle, you'll see each plant sway as you brush against it; no more clipping through non-existent trees here. Of course, this level of interactivity can lead to some scenes of great destruction, such as pillars getting knocked down, causing areas of a building to collapse.

Bad guys also benefit from the Glacier engine. When you shoot someone in the shoulder, he spins in the correct manner. Shoot a body on the

ground, and it'll move in reaction to the impact of the bullet; nothing is pre-animated, and everything is done on the fly. Characters climb stairs automatically; they'll step over debris and hop off ledges.

"The Glacier engine is capable of some incredible physics, not only with objects and cloth but with human motion," says Adams. "Coupled with the Inverse Kinematics animations, you will have the most realistic 3D engine to date. This means total immersion for the user."

An engine like this makes the possibilities seem limitless, and IO is planning on taking advantage of all the power it has available. Instead of just making a gameworld that totally revolves around your character, the team has the lofty ambition of creating what can only be described as a living, breathing, virtual world where you get to play the part of a contract killer.

To top it all off, the game is absolutely gorgeous. Detailed textures, excellent lighting, and smooth animation all make for some pretty sweet eye candy. Throw in some pre-rendered and in-game cut scenes to move the story along, and you're looking at a little slice of graphic heaven. Expect to see *Hitman* on the shelves sometime this spring.

—Li Kuo

**"Quiet kills are preferred,
so you may want to wear a
disguise, sneak in...then sneak
out the restroom window."**

—ERIC ADAMS, PRODUCER



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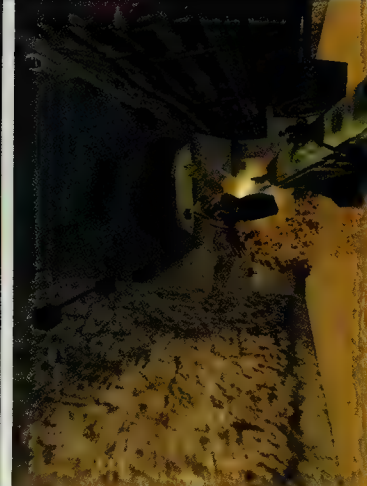
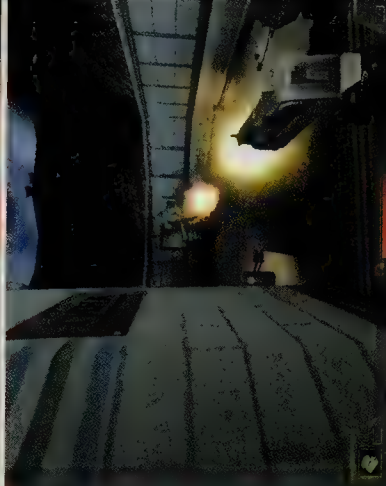
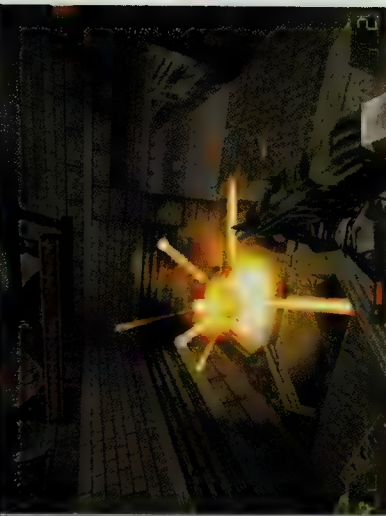
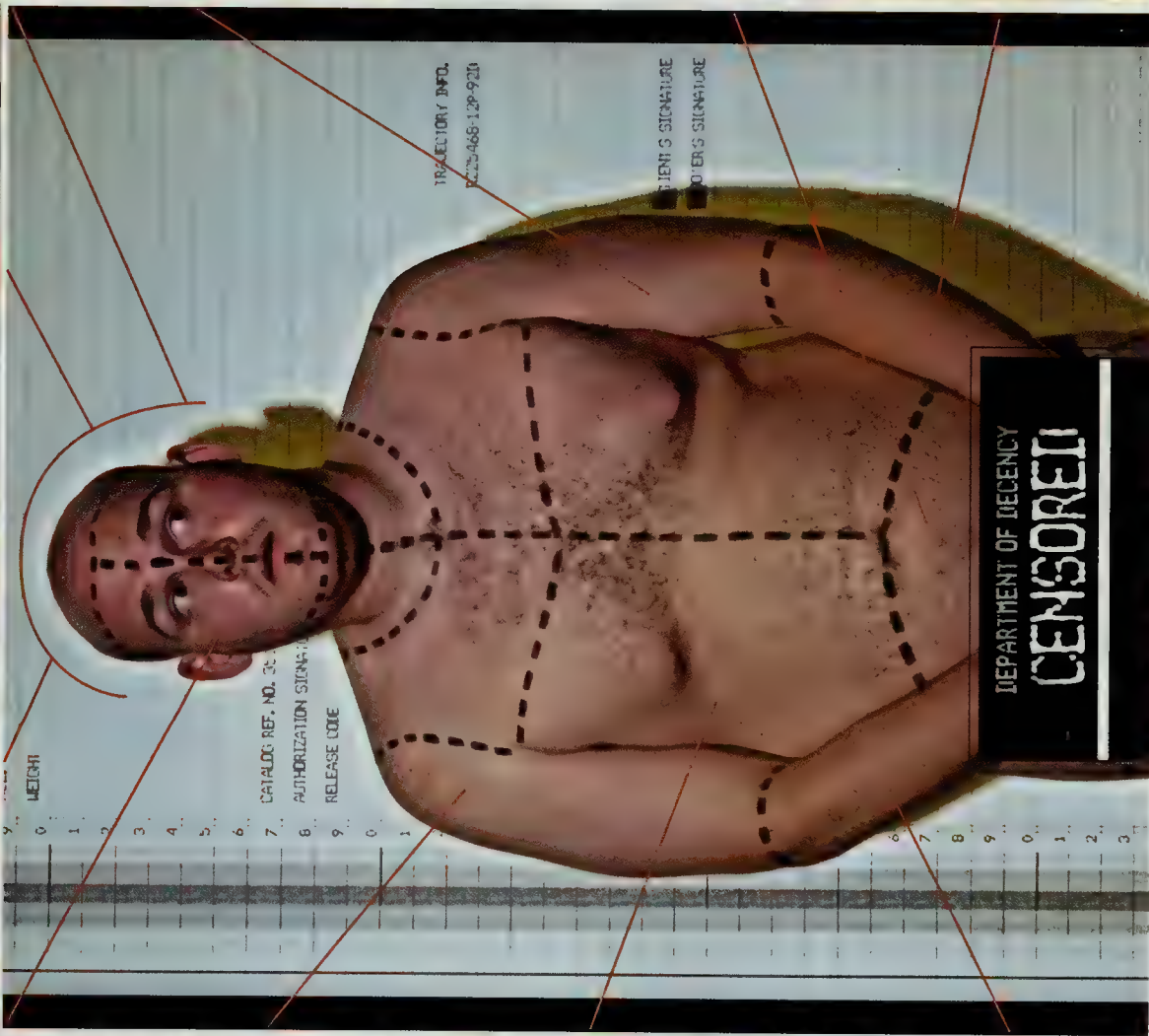
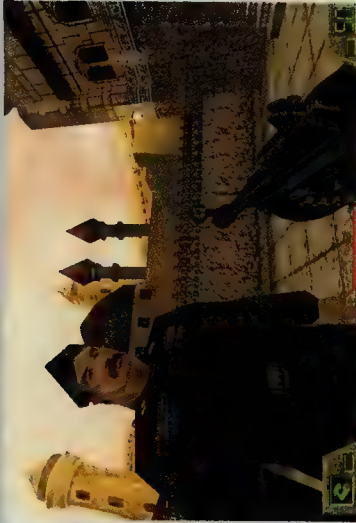
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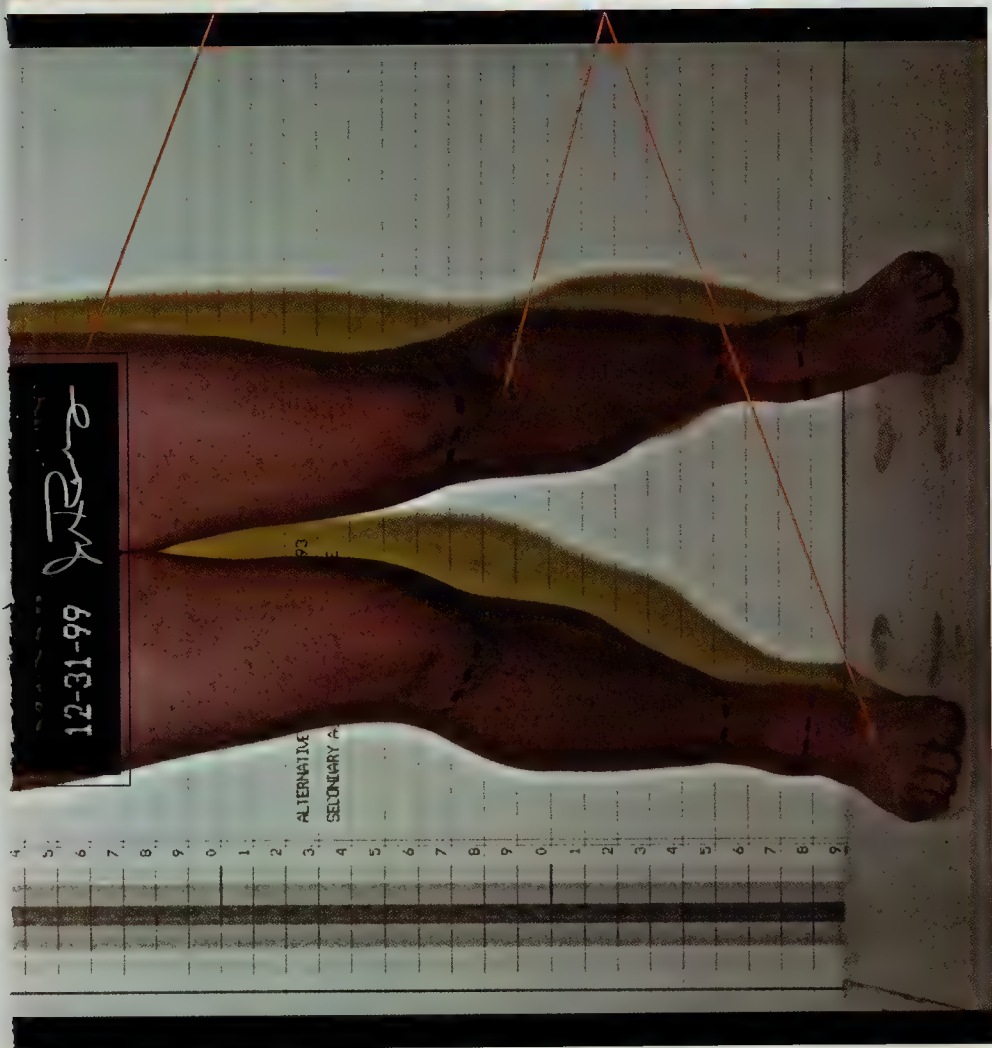
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Bethesda's Bounty

A whole host of goodies are on the way from the fine folks at Bethesda

Best known for the Elder Scrolls and Skynet series, Bethesda Softworks is gearing up to make a big impact with its upcoming lineup. With due dates scattered over the next year or so, these games are set to raise the company's profile significantly. Ranging from real-time strategy to racing sims, we've put together a list of some of the potential hits that Bethesda is currently working on. Look for more in-depth previews on a few of these titles in future issues.

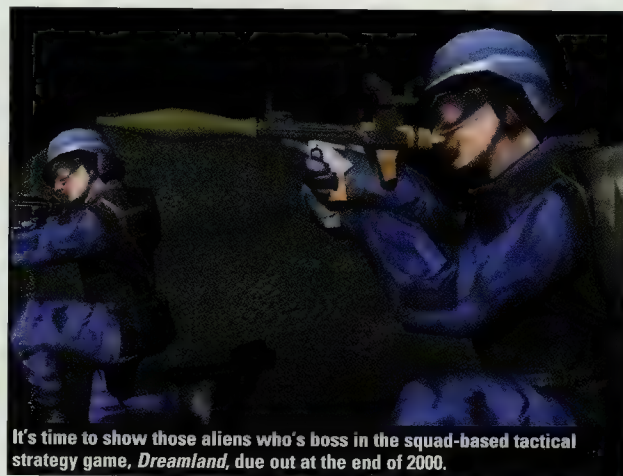
Storm

Storm is a futuristic flight combat game featuring branching campaigns and a detailed storyline. Comparisons between it and *Wing Commander* are inevitable. The player starts out as a Lieu-

tenant and works his way up to Commander. Each promotion gives the player greater control over how each mission is handled. Flyable craft range from planes to helicopters to futuristic hovercrafts. *Storm* is due sometime in late 2000. There may be a title change in store for this one.

Dreamland

From Mythos Games, the people behind the X-COM classics, *Dreamland* is a strategy/tactical combat game due sometime at the end of this year. The game takes place in a future where the Earth has been conquered by a massive alien invasion force. It's up to a band of resistance fighters — the Terran Liberation Army — to oust the invaders and take back the world; think of it as



It's time to show those aliens who's boss in the squad-based tactical strategy game, *Dreamland*, due out at the end of 2000.

X-COM in reverse. Players will have to research new weapons, capture alien technology, and negotiate with the remnants of the Earth's governments and potential alien allies. Featuring a spectacular new 3D engine, squad-based tactical combat has rarely looked so good.

Sea Dogs

Featuring a mix of roleplaying, naval combat, adventure, and strategy, *Sea Dogs* is set to bring the age of sail to your PC in a whole new way. Players start the game with little more than a ship and some gold. From there they have to decide whether to declare an allegiance to one of three countries (England, France, or Spain) or become a self-serving



Sea Dogs features incredibly detailed ship damage. Sails get ripped, masts can be broken, and hulls can be breached.



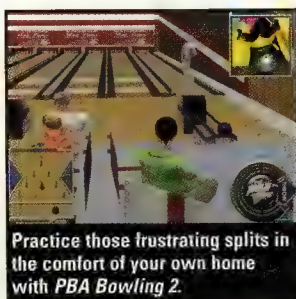
Here's one of the many ships from *Storm*, Bethesda's action flight game.

Skip Barber Racing

Racing sim fans should be excited about this one. *Skip Barber Racing* will be a comprehensive driver training game. It will include professional evaluation and feedback as players attend a simulation of Barber's three-day Racing School & Car Control Clinic. Here you'll learn such techniques as trail-braking, heel-and-toe downshifting, and much more. Players will also be able to compete in Barber's amateur "Formula Dodge" series and his professional "Pro Dodge" series. Expect extreme realism from this one. *Skip Barber Racing* is slated for an early 2000 release.



Learn to drive like the pros in *Skip Barber Racing*.

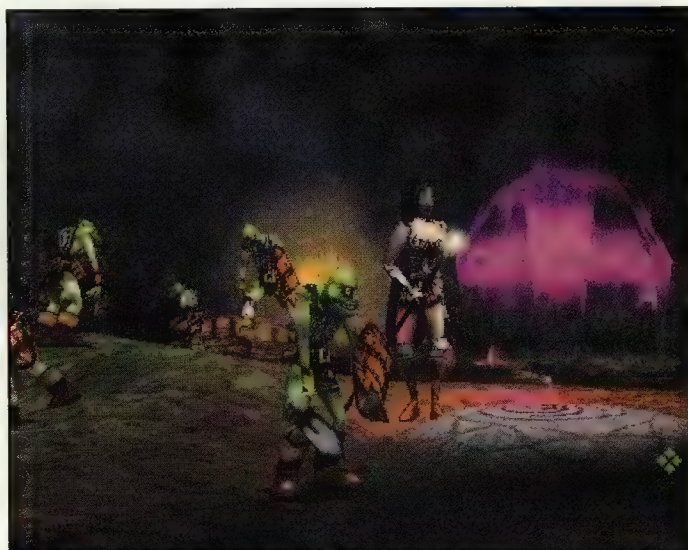


Practice those frustrating splits in the comfort of your own home with *PBA Bowling 2*.

PBA Bowling 2

Set to be the closest thing to bowling without having to rent those nasty old shoes, *PBA Bowling 2* hopes to set a new standard in bowling sims. Using skeletal models and a state-of-the-art 3D

engine, Bethesda seeks to create the most realistic bowling game ever to grace the PC. Players will be able to compete against computer players, watch fly-by camera replays of their best shots, customize the appearance of their bowler, and change the weight, color, and texture



Art of Magic takes the 2D gameplay of Mythos' *Magic & Mayhem* into a fully 3D world.

ture of the ball. *PBA Bowling 2* should be out by the time you're reading this.

Art of Magic

Art of Magic is a strategy game with a full 3D engine, featuring an updated interface and spell system based on the one in Mythos

Games' *Magic & Mayhem*. The game is set up by missions that branch at certain intervals. Players will be able to use more than 60 spells and summon 21 creatures. Experience carries over from mission to mission as the player progresses through the game. *Art of Magic* won't be out until 2001.

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The other eight planets could not be reached for comment.

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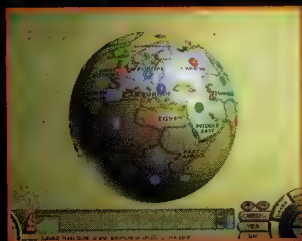
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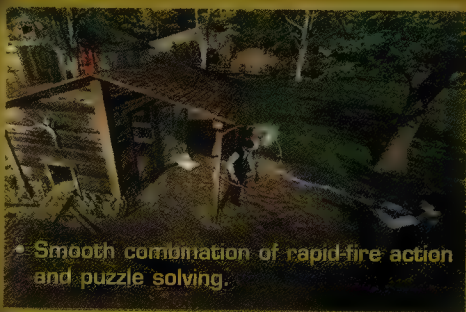
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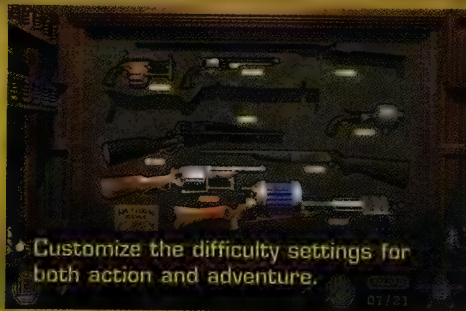


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Starsiege: Tribes Extreme Cancelled

Players will have to wait for Tribes 2 to get single-player action

Sierra has announced that *Starsiege: Tribes Extreme*, the not-quite-add-on/not-quite-sequel for the hit title *Starsiege: Tribes*, has been cancelled. The developers have been pulling double duty, working on both *Tribes Extreme* and *Tribes 2* at the same time, and it seems that the resources were being stretched a

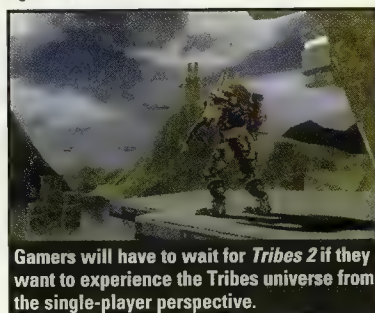
bit too thin. The original release date estimate for *Extreme* was supposed to be this holiday season, but at its current pace, there was no way that this was going to happen (or even come close). Upon further evaluation, Sierra and the development team mutually agreed that the amount of work needed to get the single-player

components of *Extreme* up to snuff for a retail release was just too overwhelming and would harm the release plans for *Tribes 2*.

Sierra states that during the production of *Tribes Extreme*, it has learned a lot about how the single-player game should work and it plans to apply that knowledge to make *Tribes 2* an even better single-player experience. Also, now that *Extreme* has been cancelled, both development teams will be working together on *Tribes 2*.

All is not lost for those eagerly anticipating the release of *Tribes*

Extreme, though; apparently, Sierra will release the new multi-player maps that the game was supposed to ship with for free on the Internet. Check out the company's web site (www.sierra.com) for more information.



Gamers will have to wait for Tribes 2 if they want to experience the Tribes universe from the single-player perspective.

THE PCG RELEASE METER A handy guide to all the latest game releases

Another sequel or hot new game on the way, and it's tough to decide which one to go with because there may be something even better right around the corner. That's where we come in. As usual, these dates are subject to change, but they should give you a good estimate on when

games will hit the stores. For up-to-the-minute info on release dates, visit [Gone Gold \(www.gonegold.com\)](http://www.gonegold.com), the best site on the net for new releases. Thanks once again to Rich LaPorte and his Gone Gold elves for putting together this month's Release Meter for us. Please send news of release dates to laporte@gonegold.com.

GAME	DEVELOPER	DATE	OUR MAGIC 8-BALL SAYS
Need for Speed: Motor City	EA	01/24/00	Start your engines.
X: Beyond the Frontier	SouthPeak	01/24/00	It will launch.
Headin' Home	Ubisoft	01/27/00	Later, than, uh...
Rollin' 6 Feet	WestPeak	01/27/00	Not later than...
Magic the Gathering Gold	Hasbro	01/31/00	The cards say yes.
Blaze and Blade	South Peak	01/31/00	Have your sword ready.
Ultimate Soldier	ET Interactive	01/31/00	Well, yes.
Thickskin Fighters	3D Realms	01/31/00	On target.
Wizardry 8	Sir-Tech	01/31/00	Not gonna happen.
Hired Guns	Psygnosis	01/31/00	It's a crap shoot.
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	01/31/00	Unlikely.
WRA: Drift Masters	Redneck	01/31/00	Not sure.
W2: A.I.	GT Interactive	01/31/00	Possibly.
B-17 Flying Fortress	MicroProse	01/20/00	Will need more time.
Conquest and Recon	WestPeak	01/20/00	Next month.
Skid Racer: Racing	Bethesda	01/20/00	Skid ships.
Mission Impossible	Infogrames	01/21/00	Yes, or it self-destructs.
Final Fantasy VIII	EA	01/26/00	Decidedly so.
Team Woods PGA Golf	EA Sports	01/26/00	Golfers are back.
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	01/26/00	Steady as.
Cave 2	Fox	01/27/99	Possible delays.
Test Drive Cycles	Infogrames	01/27/00	Sounds right.
Test Drive Rally	Infogrames	01/27/00	Should be so.
H&D: Devil's Maiden	Infogrames	01/28/00	Wish it were.
Amen: The Awakening	GT	01/28/00	We pray.
F-18	Jane's	01/29/00	Delayed take-off.
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun	WestPeak	01/29/00	A fighting chance.
Rising Sun	Talonsoft	01/29/00	Yes sir.
Dawn of War	South Peak	02/01/00	On the money.
Majesty	Hasbro	02/02/00	Unlikely, but...
Superbike 2000	EA	02/02/00	Good luck, rider.
KA-52 Team Alligator	GT	02/03/00	None.
Soldier of Fortune	Activision	02/03/00	Target is in sight.
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	Talonsoft	02/03/00	Leading pack.
Alien: Isolation	EA	02/04/00	Not ready for prime time.
The Sims	Maxis	02/04/00	With any luck.
Werewolf: The Apocalypse	ASC	02/04/00	The moon is full.
Die Hard Trilogy 2	EA	02/07/00	Wish he was.
Grand Prix Legends	EA	02/10/00	Bank on it.
Dark Reign II	Activision	02/15/00	Slips to Spring.
Madagascar	Sierra	02/15/00	We bet on March.
Top Gun	EA	02/16/00	About right.
Star Trek: Voyager	Infomply	02/16/00	Life, love, and...
Risk II	Hasbro	02/16/00	Agreed.
War	Westwood	02/16/00	Most likely.
Unreal Tournament	EA	02/16/00	Yes.
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	EA	02/22/00	Preparation is key.
Codename Eagle	Talonsoft	02/22/00	A certainty.
Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2K	Acclaim	02/22/00	Crosses the finish line.
War: World Force Remastered	EA	02/23/00	With help from the future.
Ground Control	EA	02/23/00	Unlikely.
Metal Fatigue	Psygnosis	02/23/00	Exhausted, but finished.
Le Mans 24 Hour	Infogrames	02/23/00	Green flag.

Intel has found a minor bug in some of its high-end Pentium III Coppermine chips that may interfere with the boot-up process of some computers. Intel is already set to phase out the bug in the next manufacturing cycle so future chips should not have the same problem. Only about one percent of the current yield has the bug.

Console gamers may soon outnumber their PC brethren in the online market. Datamonitor, a market analyst company, stated that 45 million console gamers will be playing online by 2002 opposed to only 28 million PC gamers. If trends continue, there should be 165 million consoles in the U.S. and Europe by 2003.

After some fierce competition, Electronic Arts has managed to secure a worldwide, multi-year licensing agreement with MGM to make games based on the 007 franchise. It has been confirmed that the first game to come out of this deal will be a first person shooter based on *The World is Not Enough*, the latest Bond movie.

Infogrames has recently acquired control of GT Interactive software after putting down an investment of \$135 million into the company. Known for *Unreal Tournament* and *Duke Nukem 3D*, GT Interactive is just one of many companies that Infogrames has acquired within the last six months.

Next Month

The PC Gamer Awards!

It's once again time for us to take stock of the year in gaming and hand down praise from the mountain top to those stellar achievements that are most deserving. Yup, the *PC Gamer* Awards are back in town for another year, and you've got a front-row seat to find out what we judge as the very best in every gaming category under the sun, from roleplaying to wargaming, from multiplayer to music. And what will be the *PC Gamer* Game of the Year? There's only one way to find out....

Dungeon Siege! We gave you a taste this issue: come back next month for the full preview of Chris Taylor's latest!

Reviews All the latest: *Quake III Arena*, *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*, *Close Combat 4*, *Jane's F/A-18 Hornet*...and more!

PC Gamer's March 2000 issue will be on sale February 11 at all good literary emporia—and airports, which is a blessing since those in-flight magazines are so very poor.

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

Another tally of what everyone wants

Don't worry...we forgive you your unnatural desire to own Blizzard's *Diablo II*. We know you can't help it. We'd just love to see some other game — any other game — dethrone this seemingly undefeatable juggernaut. Just for variety's sake, if nothing else!

So help us out and tell us what your most-anticipated game is (and don't worry, if it's *Diablo II*, we won't hold it against you — you can still vote and win). Send us an E-mail at eyewit-ness@pcgamer.com with "Waiting is the Hardest Part" as the subject line, telling us the *one* game that gets your underwear in a bunch. Every month we'll list the results and pick one lucky gamer to receive a free game from our infamous "Shelf of Gaming Goodness." All entries must be received by the 30th of each month to be eligible for that month's drawing, and the winner will be notified by E-mail with his or her name also printed in the magazine. See additional contest rules below.

Congratulations to Skip Leonadis, this month's lucky winner. Skip just can't wait for *Duke Nukem Forever*, and we don't blame him. Camp out by your mailbox, Skip — your prize is on the way!

1. <i>Diablo II</i>	13%
2. <i>Team Fortress 2</i>	10%
3. <i>The Sims</i>	8%
4. <i>WarCraft III</i>	7%
5. <i>Duke Nukem Forever</i>	5%
6. <i>Baldur's Gate 2</i>	4%
7. <i>Black & White</i>	4%
8. <i>Halo</i>	3%
9. <i>Command & Conquer: Renegade</i>	2%
10. <i>Soldier of Fortune</i>	2%

PC GAMER GIVE-AWAY CONTEST RULES

No purchase is necessary, and only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only U.S. residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, RI, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive.

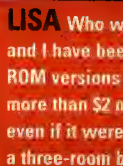
THE PCG PLAYLIST

Don't these guys ever get any frickin' free time?

Contrary to popular belief, we spend most of our time here working so hard that it's a wonder we ever get in any personal gaming time. As a result, the games that keep us occupied during downtime had better be damned good. Here's what we deemed worth playing:



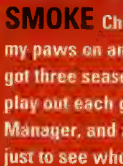
GAZ Okay, I admit it: I'm hooked on the CD-ROM version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. I won't stop until Reege coughs up the big bucks! In between my final answers, I've been enjoying a holy trinity of 3D action goodness — *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, *SWAT 3*, and *Quake III Arena*.



LISA Who wants to be a millionaire? I do! Gary and I have been playing both the online and CD-ROM versions every day this month. I have won more than \$2 million "virtual" dollars. Of course, even if it were real money, it would only let me buy a three-room bungalow here in the Bay Area!



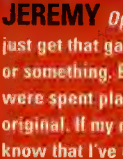
DAN I tried the new "improved" *Pong*, realized it wasn't the old *Pong*, and decided that I couldn't be bothered — why must they mess with this, dare I say it, perfect game? I'm halfway through a season of *NBA Live 2000*, likewise with *NHL 2000*, and basically I'm just a big whore for EA Sports.



SMOKE Christmas came early for me when I got my paws on an alpha version of *High Heat 2001*. I've got three seasons going right now; in one I actually play out each game, in another I'm the General Manager, and a third is totally computer-controlled, just to see who the stars of 2112 are going to be.



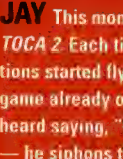
U It's been a month of *Half-Life* goodness for me. *Opposing Force* has become one of the greatest single-player experiences I've ever had. For a change of pace, I switch off with *They Hunger*, the zombie-infested level pack created by our own Neil Manke, the guy that gave us *U.S.S. Darkstar*.



JEREMY *Opposing Force*, of course, and we did just get that game — what's it called? — *Quake III*, or something. But the best moments of my month were spent playing *Pong*. Not the remake, but the original. If my modesty didn't prevent it, I'd let you know that I've gone undefeated. Yes, I would.



DEAN *Opposing Force* is my flavor of the month. It's great playing as a marine with new weapons in new environments. It's an incredible add-on that's so good it could have been sold as a new game. What? They're charging \$40 bucks at retail? I guess Sierra feels the same way I do.



JAY This month, I gave the staff a whipping in *TOCA 2*. Each time I lapped everyone, the accusations started flying: "He spent hours playing this game already on PlayStation!" Even Smoke was heard saying, "I'm not playing the Jackal anymore — he siphons the fun out of the game." Excellent...



GREG I'm still playing a lot of *Age of Wonders* this month. The damn thing's got me by the short hairs and it won't let go. If you haven't already done so, either download the demo from www.ageof-wonders.com or buy the game outright. You'll be glad you listened to me...it's the shiznit!

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Are You the Next Game God?

We kick off in earnest this month, with the first of six heats to determine which reader's game design is good enough to win a job at ION Storm!

Since the *PC Gamer* Design Lab launched two issues ago, we've been absolutely swamped by entries from readers who fancy themselves as the next Peter Molyneux or Sid Meier. We've been startled not only by the quantity but the quality of the submissions we've received. So good have they been, in fact, that we're enlisting only the very cream of the celebrity game designer crop to help judge them. Keep 'em coming!

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN FRAGA

HIRED GUNS

by Race Krehel

In this revolutionary first person action/strategy game, you play the role of a sniper, and then a foot soldier. In the first missions, you and an AI partner are in different hot-zones, assassinating small country rulers that could threaten the United States. After finding a good spot from which you make your kill, you hurry to a helicopter or a jeep and get out of town. Then the unthinkable happens. After being assigned a mission to eliminate the next Iraqi leader, all is going well. You take him out, but your ride is late and you are spotted, but luckily the chopper comes at the last second.

Now there is a full-scale war, and just dropping bombs won't work. You and your partner are assigned to be in the marines as foot soldiers, and now you're going



THIS MONTH'S CELEBRITY JUDGE:



Gabe Newell

As co-founder of Valve, the outfit behind the awesome *Half-Life* and the upcoming *Team Fortress 2*, Gabe Newell knows a thing or two about game design — and he was anxious to sink his teeth into our readers' designs. "I thought about going easy on these designs, but that seemed condescending. So I'm going to review them as if they were internal Valve proposals," he says.

into battle. You have a totally different arsenal and must work with your troops to defeat the Iraqis! You must succeed! The multiplayer could be awesome, being able to control tanks and other vehicles and fight alongside friends.

GABE SAYS: *The first part of this game seems to be a sniper simulator. I'm not sure what the AI partner is supposed to be doing. A sniper sim (kind of a cross between Tribes and Thief) could be cool, but stealth games are really hard to make fun. The thing that perks my interest is that a sniper simulator is stealthy up to a certain point, and then there's a whole bunch of action.*

The description of the full-scale war portion is pretty limited. I don't understand how you're supposed to be working with your troops. There are a number of games trying to figure out how to combine action and strategy elements (e.g. Team Fortress 2 or Battlezone), but I'm not sure whether or not this is what Race has in mind.

The concept should probably be focused more on a single game element and what innovation it would bring to the table. I'd pick the sniper simulator to flesh out.

THEME FLYER

by Mike Morgan

You own a small field, building, and a single-engine plane. Flying short "missions" is the only way to make money but also means you have to risk the only moneymaker you have: your plane. Once you save some money you will be able to buy more planes, better parts, and more pilots. But this Theme game is different than all the



others; you have to actually fly the plane in order to put the food on the table. The goal of the theme is to build up your airport, also giving you a chance to take a "desk job" to spend more time on your company, buying more land for airports, planes, etc.

Another thing that's different about this game is that you also have the chance to fly any of the planes in your fleet. But crashing your ten million dollar plane into the ground will not help your company out much. Another feature of *Theme Flyer* is that you will have the chance to buy out other big name companies, building your worth until you can take on the world.

GABE SAYS: *Mike seems to be describing a civil aviation version of Privateer or Strike Commander. He's putting more of an emphasis on the business simulation side of it than Privateer does, which could be fun. I'd probably just set it in space since that's a proven and popular setting, and it also means you don't have to worry*

THIS MONTH'S WINNER IS...

PT BOAT

by Kenneth A. Mauder

World War Two, South Pacific, battle sim, need I say more?

Picture this: You're in command of your PT Boat, the roaring sound of your engines as your patrol squadron is closing in on a Japanese convoy making a night run through "The Slot." Bullets are clipping your deck; you can see the deck guns of the escort vessels flashing in the darkness as they try to divert your torpedo run. Puffs of Ack Ack blossom all around you. The boat to starboard takes a direct hit in a beautifully 3D rendered explosion. You glance down and see the target distance closing but you can't fire just yet. Your gunners are raking the enemy decks with their twin 50s. "Fire One! Fire Two!" "Let's get the hell out of here!" Turn your boat and go like hell. Available with career mode and with historic missions. Now, this is a game that I would buy.

GABE SAYS: Kenneth's suggestion makes me think of *Wave Race with guns*. It's basically a pretty sound game concept. I'd stay away from career mode and historic missions and just focus on it being a fun action game. This is a very implementable and saleable game concept — I think this is the one most likely to actually ship.



about getting your flight model accurate enough to please all of the hardcore flight sim fans.

I always loved having my trophy room in Civilization, and having a base for a Privateer style game that I build up over time would be a hoot. If pirates tried to attack it, I'd be notified and could race back to defend it. I could upgrade it, and hire people to defend it.

HOMICIDE DETECTIVE

by Fred R. Olmsted

The game would be set in a largish city. You would be put into the role of a rookie homicide detective. The game starts off with a tip that there has been a grisly murder at a certain address. You, as the detective, have to go check out the tip. You arrive at the scene to find out that the tip was indeed true. There is a rather bloody corpse in the apartment, so you call for backup.

Here is where the game concept kicks in. You actually examine the crime scene and collect evidence. This evidence you could then send off to a forensics lab. You could also dust for fingerprints, etc. You must examine the apartment for clues to track down the killer, however all of today's high tech

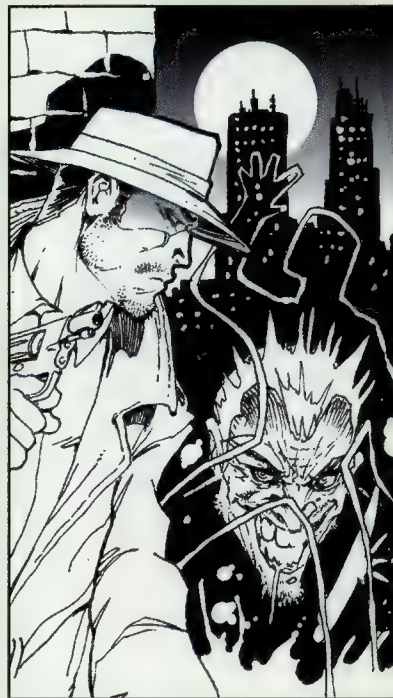
resources would be at your fingertips.

Here are some of the catches: 1) the killings continue until you have tracked him down and caught him, so you can be called in to other homicide scenes; 2) there is a time limit and if you don't catch the killer within that time limit, then he gets away; 3) the map and clues are randomly generated so no two playings or storylines would be the same.

GABE SAYS: I simply don't know how to build this game. It assumes you can create the detective show moments when you piece together a set of clues and go "ah-ha!" I don't know of any way to build an AI or a simulator to do that. You could author these kinds of crime scenarios on a monthly basis and sell them over the web, but I don't think you could create narratively compelling scenarios algorithmically. You could trivially generate scenarios at the level of Clue (e.g. Mrs. White in the Library with the Candlestick), but that would get boring pretty fast.

Maybe this is just a noir serial adventure game sold over the Internet. Maybe if adventure games were easier (i.e. their length of play was a function of ongoing content distribution and not due to the obscurity of the puzzles), and had a core cast of characters with a well-authored storyline, they could make a comeback. Having a detective setting would be fine.

PCG



HOW TO ENTER

Describe your game idea in no more than 200 words, along the lines of the entries featured on these pages. Try not to get bogged down in specific details — your space is limited, and we're just looking for a general overview of the concept and central design. The judges will be looking for originality, the potential for a playable game and that all-elusive "coolness" factor. You may provide art, either computer-generated or sketches/drawings, to help flesh out your ideas for us (and illustrate these pages!).

We'd prefer to receive entries via E-mail, so we've set up a special address for this contest: design@pcgamer.com. Send your designs along with any attached artwork. If you'd

prefer to use snail-mail, the address is PC GAMER DESIGN CONTEST, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. We cannot return entries, so please do not send original artwork. Your entries will be edited for clarity and/or length.

HOW TO WIN THAT JOB AT ION STORM

Okay, here's how it works. We'll be running this feature every month for six months. Each month, a different renowned game designer will be on hand to evaluate the best of the game design ideas we receive, and select a winner. At the end of the six months, the winners will be re-evaluated by all the judges and an overall winner will be chosen. That lucky winner will get to spend a week at ION Storm's offices, testing the

company's latest games in development. Travel to and from Dallas and hotel accommodations there will be picked up by ION Storm, but the rest is up to you. So, what are you waiting for? Get designing!

LEGAL STUFF — READ IT!

By submitting your game design idea to PC Gamer, you acknowledge that your design will become public domain — which basically means anyone can read it, take inspiration from it and use it for their own purposes. You also acknowledge that neither PC Gamer nor any of the companies affiliated with this contest has or will have any liability for the use of ideas submitted and/or published.

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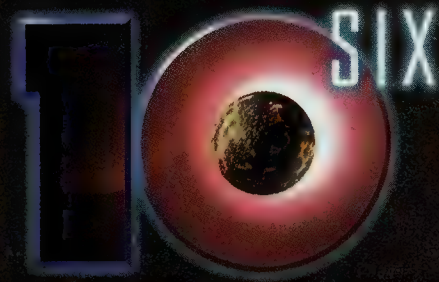
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Only a sovereign of your great stature can bring peace to the long-suffering peasants of the land. Manage your gold carefully, you'll need to spend it wisely to achieve success.

YOU ARE MIGHT

Yours is an iron-fist in a velvet glove. Battle against, or cooperate with, up to three other players in multi-player games - the choice is yours.

YOU ARE THE LAW

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We've received so much correspondence from readers over the past few months asking — scratch that, begging — for the latest information on Valve's heavily anticipated multiplayer masterwork *Team Fortress 2*, we just had to do something. So here it is...everything you'll need to upgrade your salivation to a torrential flood...

It should be obvious by now that Valve loves you. First, the frisky start-up company bestowed upon us *Half-Life*, the work of 3D action genius that forever redefined storytelling and interaction in first-person shooters. After that, the original plan was to release an expansion pack entitled *Team Fortress 2*, the sequel to the *QuakeWorld*-based multiplayer mod, *Team Fortress*. But as fate would have it, the development of *TF2* snowballed into something much bigger than any add-on package could contain: an Internet-based tour de force that's set to redefine the way we play games online.

Though *Team Fortress 2* slipped way past its release date, Valve gave the gaming community one hell of a consolation prize in the meantime: *Team Fortress Classic*. This free add-on brought the indescribably addictive, mission-based gameplay of *Team Fortress* to everyone who had purchased



The action is thick and fast as a *Team Fortress 2* squad of heavy gunners attempts to fortify positions in this Italian courtyard.

BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

Half-Life, and hooked thousands of gamers. Yet *TF Classic* is only a fore-shadow of what's yet to come....

"We're incredibly happy with *TF Classic*'s success," says Valve designer Robin Walker. "It's great to get such a positive response from the community, and it's also been a great way for us to learn more about the games we make. Multiplayer action gaming is still in its infancy, and there are a lot of people making these games who don't yet have a good understanding about what works and what doesn't. The popularity of *TF Classic* helps us believe we've got something that works."

Originally, *TF2* was slated to cater to the existing *TF* audience. But access to Valve's resources made designers Walker and John Cook rethink what the finished product could really be. The result was a revamped design, with much more ambitious goals, aimed at a broader audience.

The main goal is to make *TF2* resemble a classic war movie. "It helps novices get into the game," says Walker. "Everyone's seen war movies, and they know how everything works. If they're given a machine gun, they'll know how to use it. If someone throws a grenade at them, they'll recognize it, and know they should run. When we put people in these movie-like scenarios, people respond in instinctive ways, and we reward them for it."

DIVERSITY A GO-GO

Valve plans on including four different teams, styled after NATO, Russian, and Axis soldiers, with individual player models for each class. The twenty included maps will be larger than *TF Classic*'s, but still maintain the density of a *Half-Life* level, with the main combat emphasis on cover, and strong defensive points.

The first type of mission is *Escort*, in which one team must protect a group of defenseless players (anyone who's tried to save the flabby president in *TF Classic*'s *Hunted* map can attest to the white-knuckle thrills of this mission). In *Territorial Control*, teams duke it out with one another to control as many map



regions as they can — a variation of *TF Classic*'s Canal Zone map. "One example is the European village map, where one team starts with control of the entire village," says Walker. "They have one minute to prepare their defenses. Then the other team arrives, and tries to capture the village within fifteen minutes. The control regions in this map are the five buildings that provide the best defensive positions."

There are also Attack/Defense/Base Destruction missions, where one team has to acquire, or destroy, a certain item in an enemy base. "We've got a few other maps that don't fit within any categories," says Walker, "plus the standard *Capture The Flag*, *King of the Hill*, and so on. We're also planning a couple of maps that we'll have to play-test before we're sure they'll work, but if they do, they'll be a lot of fun. One of these is based on real-time strategy games."

When it comes to balancing gameplay with realism, the boys at Valve don't have much trouble. "We know what we want," says Walker. "We want a fun game. To us, realism isn't a lot of fun — taking a few hours to die from a wound in the stomach isn't fun. Hiding in a



trench for a few hours isn't fun. We see realism as a tool we can use to help players understand our game."

COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

Since typing is much slower than barking out commands, Valve has decided to take a bold step forward in player communication. "We decided to include voice communication, because allowing players to talk to each other supports our goal of

HALF-LIFE 2

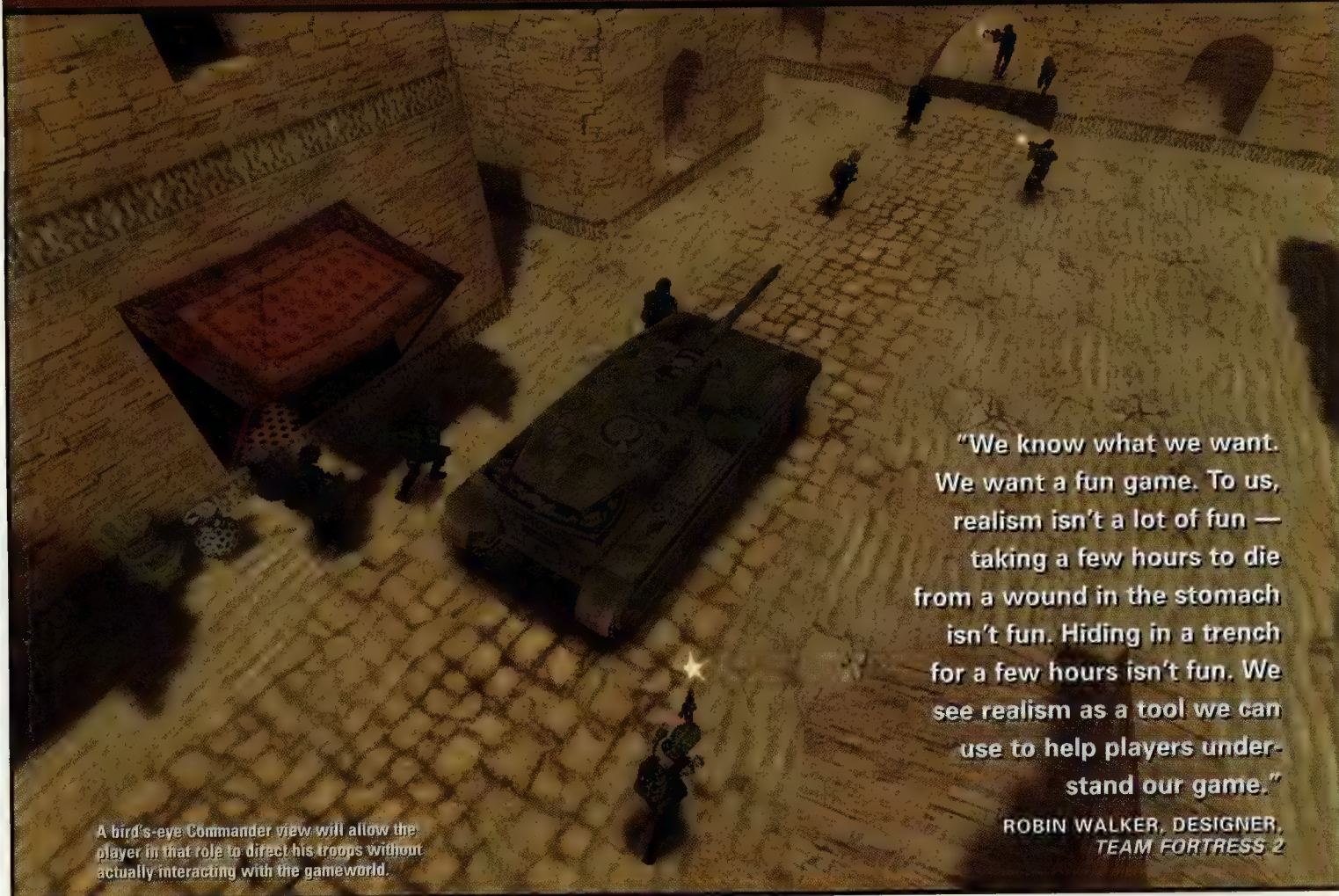
Of course, the game that has *Half-Life* fans really begging is the rumored full sequel. Having achieved unprecedented critical and commercial success, a follow-up would seem inevitable, after all. But curiously, a full year after the original game's release, Valve has never gone on the record regarding the status of a sequel...until now.

Valve's managing director Gabe Newell admits that it's been tough to keep quiet on the issue under such intense media pressure. "I have been dodging so many questions about *Half-Life 2*, I feel like I'm playing *Hunted* with Robin Walker again," he says. "Obviously we'd be stupid not to create a sequel to *PC Gamer*'s number one

rated game of all time. And obviously there's a lot from *Half-Life* that was left unresolved. However, I don't want to talk about it until we know how *Half-Life 2* is going to be a bigger step forward than the original. We have the luxury of being driven by our own aspirations, rather than by cost constraints or short-term thinking. In contrast, there have been some pretty mediocre sequels that have come out lately, and as a gamer that's been really disappointing. Fans expect that *Half-Life 2* will be the most amazing game they've ever played, and the game will be announced when we know how we are going to deliver that."

So there you have it. Er, almost.

TEAM FORTRESS 2



A bird's-eye Commander view will allow the player in that role to direct his troops without actually interacting with the gameworld.

"We know what we want. We want a fun game. To us, realism isn't a lot of fun — taking a few hours to die from a wound in the stomach isn't fun. Hiding in a trench for a few hours isn't fun. We see realism as a tool we can use to help players understand our game."

ROBIN WALKER, DESIGNER,
TEAM FORTRESS 2

creating a social entertainment experience," says Walker. And since *TF2* is a team-based game, players will need to stay in touch with each other via the Commander, whose orders are always visible on the on-screen HUD. "The Commander has a direct voice link to whoever he selects with the mouse, so he's able to quickly warn them if they're about to get into trouble," says Walker. "Text communication is also available. We also have a vague text-to-speech capability, using a dictionary of over a thousand WAV files — each a single word — which

can be strung together to form sentences. The advantage of the text-to-speech communications is that they can be pre-assigned to keys, so if you have something you want to say a lot, like 'I've got the flag!' you can do that instead of speaking it into your microphone all the time."

Players can also communicate with body movements, like pointing and waving. And to keep everyone working as a team, the on-screen compass frequently points to your commander. Grouping around him provides players with a juicy morale bonus — all the more reason to stick together.

Keeping with the game's war-movie feel, players don't just drop into a random "spawn room" — in most maps, they're driven into battle via armored personnel carriers. This allows Valve to deploy players to different spots in the map, based on the game's current standings, to keep things balanced out. Another major advantage to this is keeping soldiers grouped together. "We think that when four players leap out of the back of an APC, they'll more than likely stick together for a bit," says Walker.

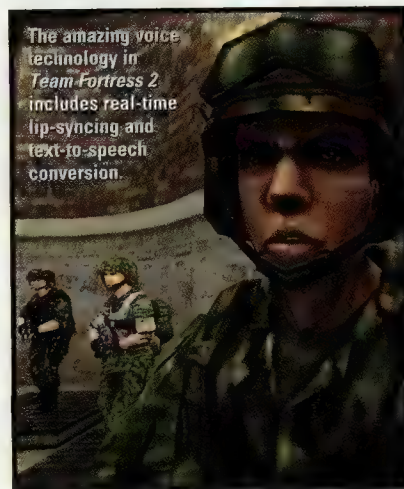
Though the *Quake II* engine is still providing the backbone for *TF2*, it's been so heavily modified that there's barely any resemblance to anything id-related. Some of the eye-candy effects you'll be bathing in include true volumetric fog, facial animation, and parametric animation that "blends" move-

GETTING CLASSY

The biggest draw of *Team Fortress* is that all players are not created equal; there are a number of different classes with special abilities. Here's the current list:

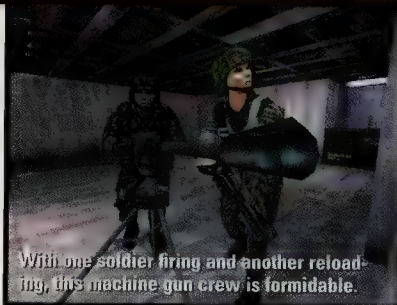
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|------------------|---------------|
| • Marine | • Ranger |
| • Machine Gunner | • Field Medic |
| • Sniper | • Engineer |
| • Commando | • Spy |
| • Flame-thrower | • Coach |
| • Officer | • Commander |

Each class uses a different model, and Valve wants to ensure that you'll be able to identify certain enemies from afar. And all of the classes should be playable in most missions, so those who prefer perfecting one class will have plenty of opportunity. "Some missions do limit the classes you can use, but generally you can play all the classes," says Walker. "The balance is a delicate thing, and removing one class from the map usually makes another too powerful."



The amazing voice technology in *Team Fortress 2* includes real-time lip-syncing and text-to-speech conversion.

TEAM FORTRESS 2



With one soldier firing and another reloading, this machine gun crew is formidable.

ments together. But the most exciting improvement comes in the form of Intel's MRM (multi-resolution mesh) technology. This allows Valve to build character models with ungodly polygon counts, and let MRM "scale" the level of detail up and down, depending on the system you're running. The results are jaw-dropping — every detail, down to the stubble on a soldier's chin, is visible when you get up-close.

But Valve insists that they don't do technology for technology's sake. "We decide what gameplay experience we want to deliver, and then make our technology decisions based on that," says Walker. "We use Intel's MRM technology because we want to display characters with as much detail as possible. Lots of detail makes them a lot more interesting to the player."

And thankfully, MRM doesn't discriminate against slower systems. The engine can scale down models to a more manageable level, so you can play the game on your existing system just as smoothly as the latest whiz-bang Pentium III with a GeForce card. "We'll be able to run on older machines, and on the newer machines we'll not only run faster, we'll also look better," explains Walker. "We're working on a scalable solution to our voice technology as well, so hopefully your connection will affect how much voice the game's willing to give you, and not impact your gameplay."

ACTUALLY, SPEED IS THE KEY!

The most crucial part of *TF2* is ensuring that it actually plays well over the Internet, and connection speed is still the biggest stumbling block in designing a network game. But fear not — Valve's programming guru, Yahn Bernier, has been optimizing the 'net code ever since *Half-Life* shipped last year. Some major improvements will be featured in an upcoming *Half-Life* update, which will test out *TF2*'s network codebase. As of now, the maximum number of supported players is 32, but it's a design decision as opposed to a technological one. "We won't change that unless we think our game is still fun at higher numbers," says Walker.

Though *TF2* has missed its Christmas release date, when these guys push something back, you can bet that the extra time is well-spent. Even though the trademark release date for all 3D shooters has been "When it's done," Walker has a different qualification: "When it's great." And we're all hoping that day comes soon....



Incorporating infantry, armor and air attacks, *Team Fortress 2* looks sure to be the most realistic down'n'dirty tactical combat game ever.

IT'S TIME TO POWERPLAY!

EXCLUSIVE! Valve teams up with Cisco Systems to finally make seamless online gameplay a reality...for everybody!

Most of us know the problem only too well...our online gaming fun crippled by poor Internet connections. While the lucky ones with cable modems, ISDN and T1 lines can have a perfectly fluid and fast Internet multiplayer experience, those of us still struggling with a 56K modem and regular phone line (and that's most of us) so often find that Internet games — particularly 3D action games — are just too laggy to enjoy properly.

Well, maybe that's all about to change. Valve has teamed up with Cisco Systems to announce PowerPlay, a new set of standards and protocols designed to improve online gaming. If PowerPlay does all it promises, your lag and ping-times are about to get a whole lot better — the target is to reproduce the fluid speed of LAN gaming on the Internet. The intention is that PowerPlay will become an open

industry standard. Epic Games and BioWare have already hopped on board, with more major developers expect to follow soon.

The first dial-up PowerPlay service should be ready by the time you read this, with users offered a free 30-day trial, and Valve has prepared a new (and free!) PowerPlay-enabled edition of *Team Fortress Classic* to show what the technology is capable of.

"In sitting down with Cisco and our ISP partner's engineers, it was clear that there were a lot of opportunities to extend the Internet to better handle games and entertainment," says Valve's Gabe Newell. "Giving gamers a free copy of PowerPlay-enhanced *Team Fortress* and a free month of PowerPlay service will let them see the progress we've made so far. PowerPlay 2.0 will benefit from the broader participation and deployment of an open standards initiative."

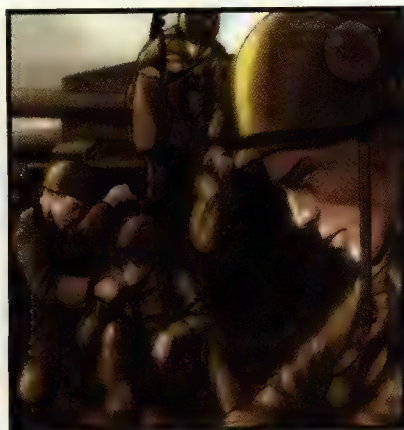
TOTAL CONVERSION MANIA!

If you think Valve and Gearbox are the only *Half-Life* masters in town, wait until you see what the "amateur" online community has been producing for the world's favorite action game....

Total conversions are by no means a new occurrence in the world of PC gaming. Ever since *Aliens: Total Conversion* came out for *Doom*, people have come to realize that you don't have to be limited by what the developers originally had in mind for a game. Soon, modifications and add-ons started popping up everywhere. Some were downright incredible, such as *Team Fortress Classic*, while others quickly descended into vaporware hell.

As part of this month's *Half-Life*-athon, we're taking a look at six of the most promising new user-created add-ons. Bear in mind that these titles are still "in the works" and some may never see the light of day due to the self-funded nature of their development (apart from *They Hunger*, of course), so don't be too surprised if any these end up in limbo a month from now. Be sure to check out the websites for release dates. And remember these all require that you have the original *Half-Life* already installed on your system. But then, why *wouldn't* you have? I mean what are you, nuts?

BY LI C. KUO



THEY HUNGER

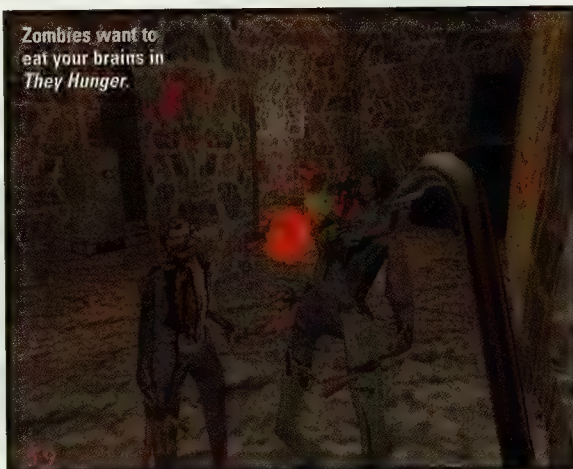
FIND IT ON THIS MONTH'S CD!

The zombie-riffic *They Hunger* is the next big thing to come from Neil Manke, the genius behind one of the highest-rated *Half-Life* mods ever, *PC Gamer's U.S.S. Darkstar*. Think *Half-Life* meets *Night of the Living Dead*. You play a burned-out writer who's been sent by his publisher to a house in the country for some much needed R&R. As you make your way toward town, you hear a mysterious announcement over the radio — something about strange atmospheric phenomena. You push the thought out of your mind and figure that it's nothing. Of course, any self-respecting PC gamer will know better. There's zombies in them thar woods!

They Hunger is the undead mother off all *Half-Life* add-ons. There's more new stuff in this total conversion than you can shake a shotgun at. Just wait 'till you see your first zombie rise from the grave and come stumbling toward you. Make no mistake, this mod is *all* about zombies — male zombies, female zombies, headless zombies, even cop zombies that still remember how to use their guns. In fact, the only returning bad guy I've seen that's from the original *Half-Life* is the head crab. Of course, now they seem to *talk*, and in extremely creepy voices might I add. Actually, all the bad guys talk. The instant you come into view you'll be greeted by a chorus of zombie voices saying, "Fresh meat...brains...fresh meat."

So what's a writer to do when encountered by a horde of brain-craving zombies? What, take a shotgun to em', that's what! Bad guys aren't all that's new here — there's a whole new arsenal for you to play with. A

Zombies want to eat your brains in *They Hunger*.



silenced Glock, a shotgun, and a sniper rifle are just some of the weapons you'll come across. The Glock and the sniper rifle are especially cool. If you want slow, controlled fire, you leave the silencer on, but hit the secondary fire and your character will unscrew the silencer and you'll be able to fire twice as fast. The sniper rifle is just as awesome — you get an ultra-cool night-vision scope on this puppy, perfect for blowing off zombie heads in the dark.

Sounds pretty cool so far, right? Well, there's more! Get ready for some great new in-game cut-scenes. Cars crash through windows, zombies cook dinner (not a pretty sight) and policemen try in vain to stop the oncoming tide of undead. Pair that with some terrific level design and you've got one of the greatest *Half-Life* mods ever made.

So where can you get this awesome mod? Right here on this month's *PC Gamer* CD, of course — oh, and of course all over the Internet once everybody has ripped it off and posted it.

DAY OF DEFEAT

<http://www.planethalflife.com/dod>

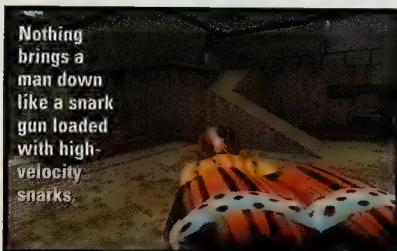
This is team play based in a World War Two setting, similar to *Team Fortress Classic*. Character classes range from Riflemen to Medics to Combat Engineers — seven in total. Expect to see historically accurate weapons such as the M1 Garand, Thompson 30 sub-machine gun, and a flamethrower (my favorite). The developers are shooting for a high level of realism for this one, which means one good headshot will put you down. A single player scenario is also in the works.



SNARK WARS

<http://people.bu.edu/jwf/>

Remember snarks, those tenacious little *Half-Life* critters that you could pick up and send skittering across the floor to pester and kill your enemies? Well, fans of those rabid little buggers should be thrilled about *Snark Wars*. All the weapons have been completely changed to match the snark motif — the snark grenade releases a pack of snarks instead of explosives, the snark gun fires high velocity snarks, and then there's the snark ray, a weapon that transforms your opponents into (what else?) snarks. There's no real storyline as yet, but just the premise behind this one is enough to get *Half-Life* players interested. Wait 'til you see the boomer; it makes all the snarks within a certain radius instantly gib.



GUNMAN

<http://gunman.telefragged.com>

This one is shaping up to be a thing of beauty. Looking more like a mod using the *Unreal* engine than *Half-Life's* *Quake II* tech, *Gunman* is a futuristic single-player mod set in a very cool sci-fi world. Overflowing with features such as all-new weapons with adjustable power levels, four planets to explore, and more new enemies than you can shake a crowbar at,

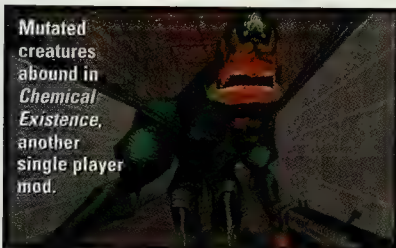


Gunman is looking so good that it might actually go retail. Do yourself a favor and check this one out now!

CHEMICAL EXISTENCE

<http://www.redgenesis.com>

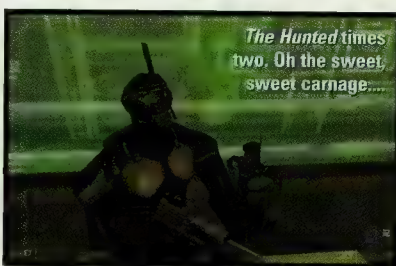
You are Reece Max (*Who comes up with these names?* — Ed.), a man who's found himself in the wrong place, at the wrong time. In this case, the wrong place is a city in ruins that's crawling with unknown creatures and other Very Bad Things that you wouldn't want to bump into in a dark alleyway. Once again, there are new levels, new weapons, and new baddies to use them on. The weapons line-up is impressive, ranging from a simple wooden plank to a plasma gun. Early screens are showing some very impressive new textures and characters. This single player conversion looks very promising, and might even be available by the time you read this.



SABANETA 2050

<http://www.planethalflife.com/sabaneta>

Okay, how many of you have played *The Hunted* on *Team Fortress Classic*? How many of you enjoyed it? Okay, you can all put your hands down. Now, imagine playing that game with new weapons, new levels, and new character classes. Still not excited? Imagine playing a variation in which both teams have a leader to protect. The game ends when either the team leader is killed or the other team is

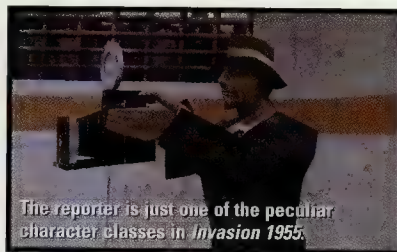


wiped out. Get ready for some seriously hardcore multiplayer goodness from this one. The *PC Gamer* team is already wide-eyed with anticipation.

INVASION 1955

<http://www.planethalflife.com/invasion1955/index.shtml>

And now for something completely different. *Invasion 1955* is a team-based mod set in England during 1955. Aliens have taken control of the British government and it's up to the commoners to save the day. The character design in this mod is what sets it apart from all the others — never before have character classes been so...well, downright quirky. The bad guys include police constables, MI5 agents and soldiers, while the good guys range from athletes, to priests, to journalists (yay! — Ed.), each with their own special abilities. Journalists can blind people with the flash from their cameras and priests can pray for members of their team for healing and strength. This one is definitely worth dialing into your web browser.

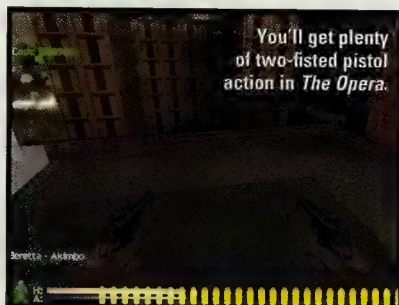


THE OPERA

<http://www.halflife.net/opera/index.shtml>

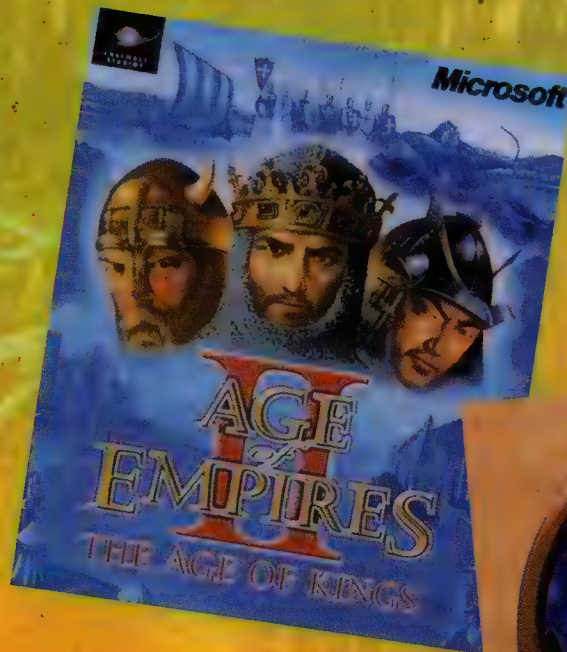
Here's one that's sure to please John Woo fans. *The Opera* is a total conversion based on the Hong Kong director's two-fisted action style, which means that there will be mucho jumping, flipping, and never-ending pistol fights. The focus will be on a "movie realism" kind of game. It only takes a few shots to kill a guy, but you'll be able to pull off incredible stunts to avoid getting hit. The programmers are hoping to create an experience that's similar to one of Woo's "gunplay ballets." Of course, there will be plenty of new weapons, levels, and skins. This add-on looks set to be a must-have for fans of *The Matrix* and *Face/Off*.

PCG



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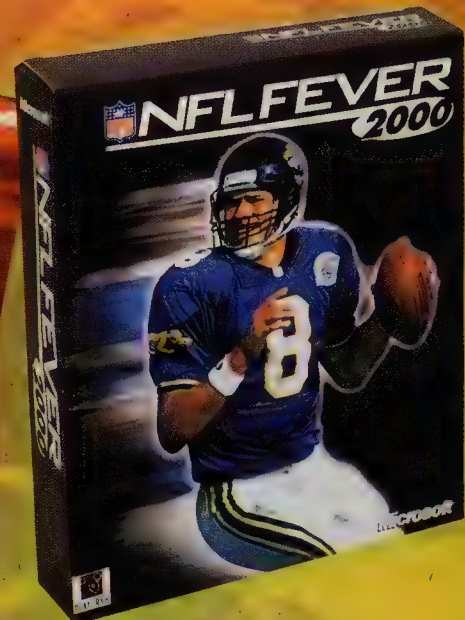
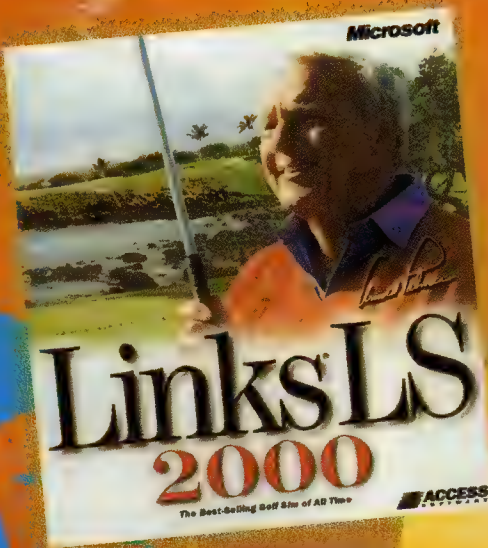
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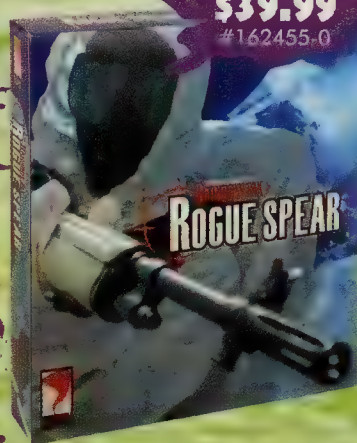


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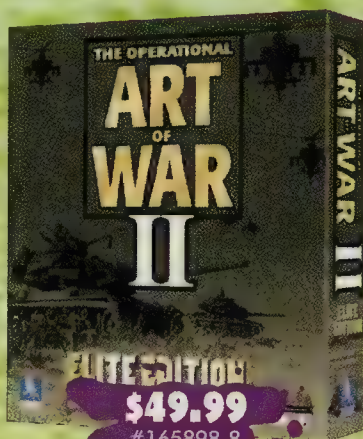
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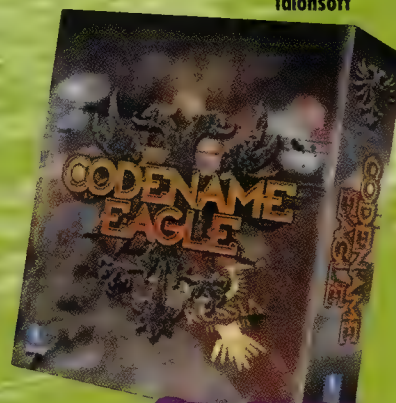
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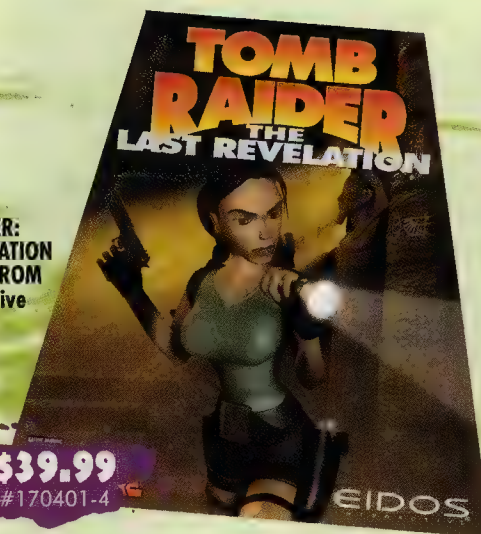


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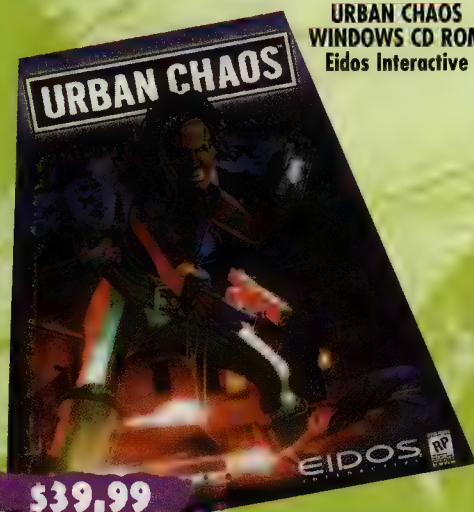
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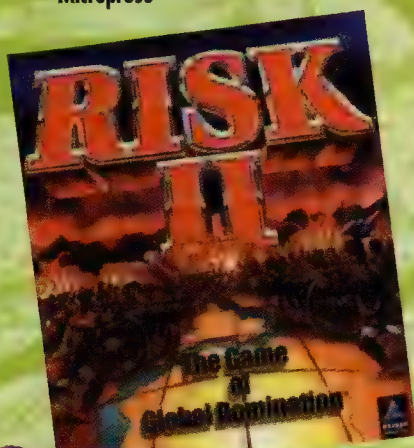
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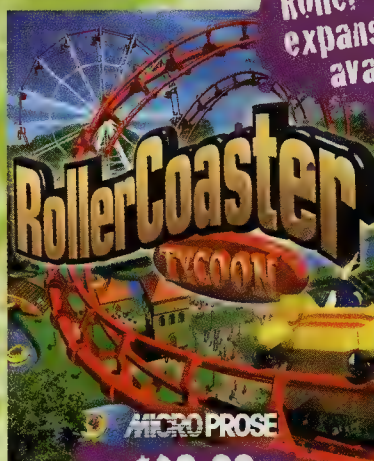
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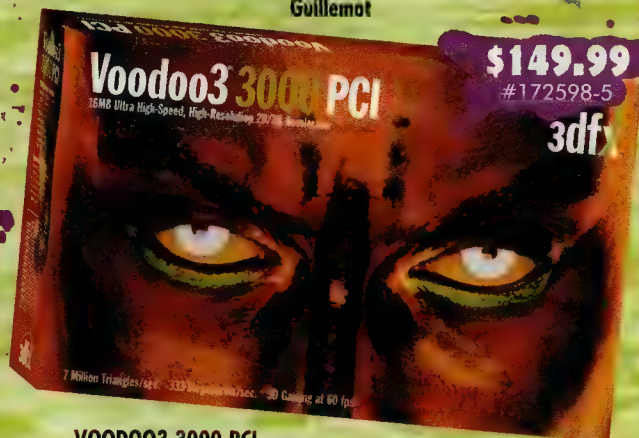
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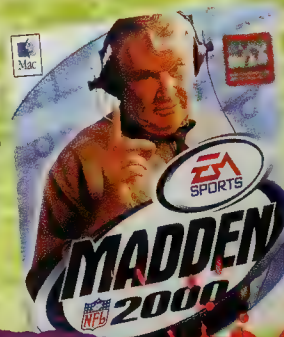
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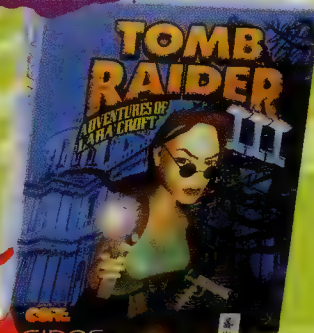
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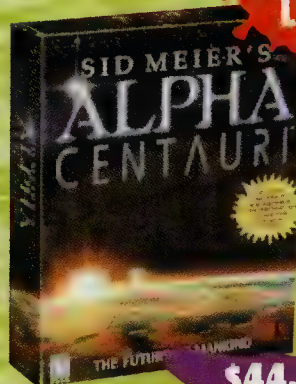
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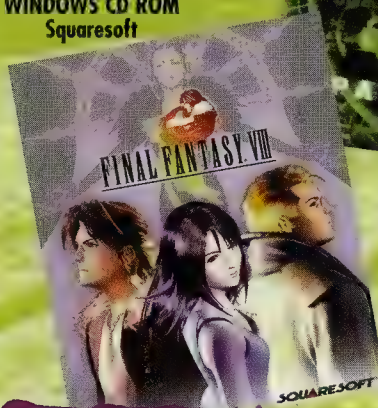
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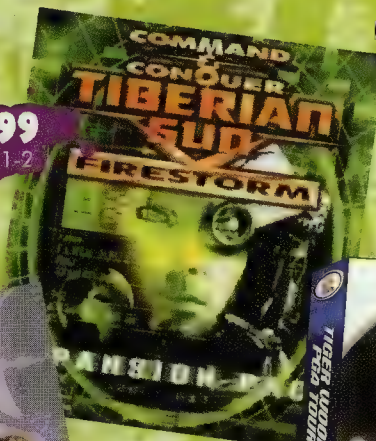


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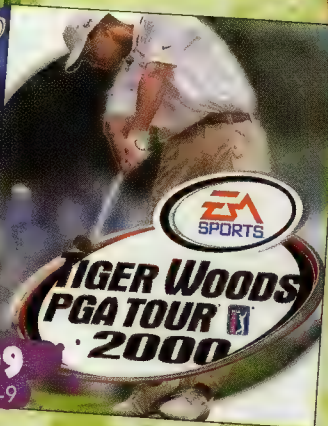


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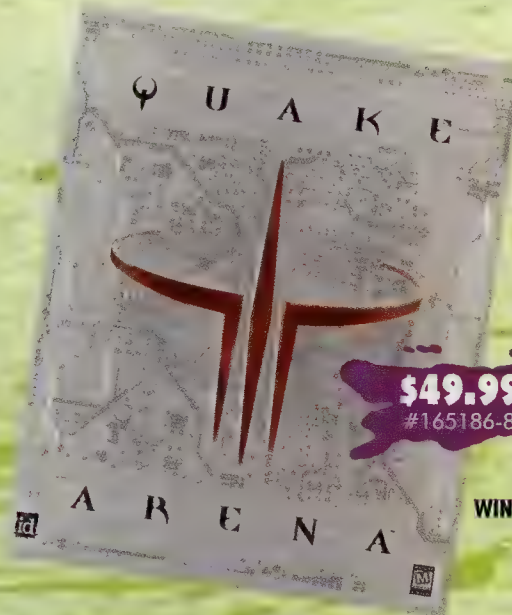


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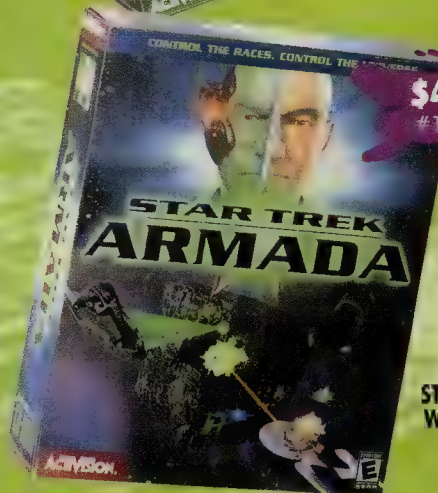
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THE ROLEPLAYING APOCALYPSE!



RPG fans are mostly immune to all this fuss about the new millennium and the Apocalypse. After all, the end of the world is always imminent in roleplaying games, and we have ten titles on their way that promise all-new, all-horrific Armageddons unless a virtuous hero can save the day.

By T. LIAM McDONALD

The history of the roleplaying game is the history of computer games. They were among the first games to claw from the muck and mire of the 8-bit machines at a time when there was no such thing as an "action" category as something distinct from the pure arcade game. First-person combat was born of the RPG (*Wizardry*, anyone?), and when the wiseguys at id stripped the character development, magic, and storytelling from RPGs to create *Wolfenstein 3D*, they opened the gulping pit that would slowly swallow computer roleplaying whole.

But you can't keep a good genre down. Despite a bleak few years in which no RPGs of note were released, a comeback was clearly in the cards. Gamers wanted — heck, *needed* — the more sophisticated gameplay, combat mechanics, and story that uniquely distinguish the RPG. When the genre finally did bubble back to the surface with *Fallout*, *Diablo*, *Ultima Online*, and *Might & Magic VI*, the floodgates were opened. 1999 gave us one hit after another: *Baldur's Gate*, *Fallout 2*, *Ultima Ascension*, *Planescape Torment*, *Might & Magic 7*, and more. 2000 will see twice as many titles.

Such a large number of new RPGs have signaled an eventual recession in the past, since boom and bust are historically cyclical in gaming. But that may not happen this time. The genre has been blown wide open, and the nine titles discussed here show the extreme range of styles and approaches that fall under the rubric of "roleplaying."

RPG pioneers SSI have returned the genre to its roots with a sequel to its trend-setting *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Gold Box* classic *Pool of Radiance*, and three other radically different AD&D games are in the works from Interplay. Online roleplaying is tapping a completely new vein of adventure, while the combat-heavy gameplay of *Diablo* is spawning a diverse array of action-oriented RPGs. This breadth of game styles may be the savior of the RPG in the long run, as the continued experimentation and hybridization keeps this easily stagnated genre vital. The litany of A-List talent behind them — people responsible for such hits as *Total Annihilation*, *Fallout*, *Freespace*, *Baldur's Gate*, the original *Neverwinter Nights*, and more — can't hurt either.

From the earliest days of PC gaming to the current 3D-accelerated edge of the millennium, the roleplaying genre has defined the computer game industry. Here, assembled with attention to their places in the historic development of the genre, is the *next* wave of roleplaying greats.

BLAST TO THE PAST:

POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR

A whole generation of gamers may have no clue what "Gold Box" RPGs were, but along with *Ultima* and *Wizardry*, they were probably among the first deep gaming experiences for any veteran gamer. "Gold Box" refers to a series of AD&D RPGs released in the 1980s by SSI, and the company is clearly trying to forge a bridge to the past by returning to the genre with *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor*. *Pool of Radiance* was the first Gold Box game and the first AD&D computer game.

Pool of Radiance producer Jon Kromrey attributes SSI's departure from RPGs to a combination of genre slump, the move from 2D sprite-based RPGs to more action-based 3D RPGs, and the failure of the ambitious *Thunderscape* line.



SSI and Stormfront already have an excellent graphics engine for *Pool of Radiance*, which can provide space for huge monsters on the screen.



Both characters and backgrounds are fully 3D in *Pool of Radiance*, creating some very fluid animations.

SSI met with Wizards of the Coast last year to renegotiate the D&D license in order to continue the "Gold Box" games since, as Kromrey says, "roleplaying games have always been a strong point of SSI. It was a genre we wanted to get back into."

This traditional party-based adventure begins in New Phlan, the original setting for *Pool of Radiance*, and ranges throughout the Forgotten Realms. The eponymous pool is exuding some strange force that turns everyone into the undead. Cities, ruins, dungeons, and caves provide the backdrop for a series of non-linear quests, some tied to the main storyline, others just side trips for pumping up stats.

Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor

Publisher: SSI
Developer: Stormfront
Due date: Fall 2000
Perspective: Top-down
Party size: 1-4 main members, 2 NPCs
Engine: Fully 3D
Multiplayer: Player hosted for 2-6 gamers.
Quests are unique to multiplayer.

"Myth Drannor is one of the most dangerous places in the Forgotten Realms," Kromrey says, "and the non-player characters reflect this. Some NPCs will be glad to see you. Others will be suspicious. Various NPCs will consider offers for items or buy things from players as part of their own personal storylines." During NPC encounters, several dialogue choices are expressed as one- to six-word "sentences." As conversations unfold, previously available subjects vanish and new ones appear to prevent tedious "choose every subject" interactions. In addition, the NPCs (and monsters) will "know" about the party's progress through the game and about the powerful items they have acquired. This knowledge will change how a character responds and negotiates.

One look at the early screens shows just how sharp this game looks. 3D character animations are fluid and screen-filling monsters common. The environment is wholly interactive, allowing characters to stand on a table for a hit bonus and to bar doors to keep enemies at bay. "We added this feature to support as much of the traditional D&D rules as possible," Kromrey says. "The technology we're using allows the best character animation system we've seen and a 3D interactive environment. The new animation system uses full 3D models and transitions their movements so smoothly that the characters really seem to come alive on the screen."

"The technology we're using allows the best character animation system we've seen and a 3D interactive environment. The new animation system uses full 3D models and transitions their movements so smoothly that the characters really seem to come alive on the screen."

**JOHN KROMREY, PRODUCER,
POOL OF RADIANCE**

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL:

BALDUR'S GATE II

On the opposite side of the Forgotten Realms from Myth Drannor, BioWare is laboring hard to craft a follow-up to *Baldur's Gate*, PC Gamer's RPG of the year for 1998. The events of *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* take place a few months after the original in the Amn region along the southern portion of the Sword Coast. Disaster follows your victory as you are captured and imprisoned by persons unknown. "As far as locations go," says Co-Lead Designer Kevin Martens, "we have a wide, wide selection: dungeons of all shapes and sizes, sewers, the Elven forests of Tethir, the Cloudpeak Mountains, settlements of the Underdark, the Astral plane, the Abyss, and Athkatla, the capital city of Amn, a Sahuagin city deep beneath the ocean, pirate towns, troll mounds, and so on. All of these areas are ultra-detailed, hand-painted backgrounds."

More than 100 quests — some tied to the main plot, others completely unrelated, with difficulty varying from a few minutes to epic journeys — outdoes even the original in terms of scope. "We've tried to avoid basic 'FedEx' quests by adding more complexity to your average plot," Martens says. "There are very few one-step item retrieval quests. We have more puzzles of different kinds, as well. Our dungeons are more along the lines of Durlag's Tower from *Tales of the Sword Coast* than they are like Ulcaster from *Baldur's Gate*."

More than twice as many monsters will be found in *BG2* as in the original, with beasts like the mysterious Beholder, brutish trolls, enigmatic mind flayers, umber hulks, great cats, imps, shadows, rabbits, moose, otyugh, spectres, and more. One new playable race (the half-orc) and a number of special subclasses are being added, and the magic system has been radically expanded to include more than 300 spells. Each class of character may now also obtain a stronghold: a castle for the fighter, a thieves' guild for the thief, and so on. Each stronghold has a number of quests avail-



With twice as many monsters drawn from the AD&D rules, the Sword Coast of *Baldur's Gate II* will be more deadly than ever before.

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

Publisher: Interplay

Developer: BioWare

Due date: Fall 2000

Perspective: Top-down

Party size: 1-8

Engine: Modified "Infinity" engine from *Baldur's Gate*, with 2D backgrounds and 3D effects.

Multiplayer: Cooperative version of the solo game.



The *Baldur's Gate* Infinity engine is being upgraded for *Baldur's Gate II*, complete with 3D effects.

"We've tried to avoid basic 'FedEx' quests by adding more complexity to your average plot. There are very few one-step item retrieval quests."

**KEVIN MARTENS, CO-LEAD DESIGNER,
BALDUR'S GATE II**

able only to the player who owns the stronghold. And high-level characters can be imported from *Baldur's Gate*: a common feature in older RPGs but rare today.

Baldur's Gate II uses an updated version of the original game's Infinity engine, with optional 3D hardware support for effects such as spells, "fog of war" and water. A much wider playfield is possible thanks to support for 800x600 resolutions and a removable interface panel. Pathfinding, a real headache in the original, is addressed by widening paths so that three to four characters can walk abreast. "Bumping" also helps, since a blocking character will move to one side to let another pass and then move back into place. And the endless walking of *Baldur's Gate* is alleviated by increased walking speed and less "dead space" within locations. As Martens says, "Our areas are packed with things to do."

JUST SHOW ME WHERE TO SHOOT:

ICEWIND DALE

The Forgotten Realms are getting mighty crowded. But while *Pool of Radiance* and *Baldur's Gate II* provide complex narrative adventures set there, Interplay's *Icwind Dale* is pure dungeon crawl all the way. "There are fewer dialogue-intensive characters in our game," says designer J.E. Sawyer. "Many areas are dungeon environments where the creatures you encounter either cannot communicate with your characters or have absolutely no desire to. However, this does allow us to take important characters and make their dialogues more detailed and complex. The focus of the game will definitely be on action



Icwind Dale is a pure dungeon crawl, offering heavy combat and less dialog. Think of it as *Diablo* with a better combat system.

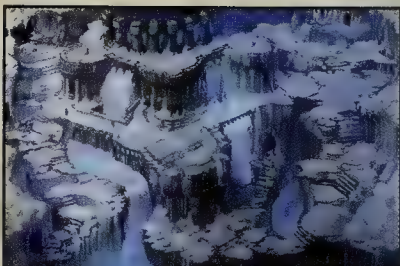
and dungeon exploration, but we are not going to 'dumb down' the dialogue."

Though the focus of *Icwind Dale* is characterized by harsh winter landscapes, Interplay's Black Isle development studio is trying to mix up the game environments with crypts, a dormant volcano, majestic ruins, and a host of other visually impressive locations. "We're trying to vary the level design from area to area while keeping a consistent feel within a specific place," Sawyer says. "One area of the game has a very organic, hot, natural feel to its layout. A later area, by contrast, should give the player a very mild, dim, structured feeling. In terms of the game design itself, it varies as well. Some places are very linear and simple in their design. Other areas of the game require an intense level of thought to determine the best approach."

In *Baldur's Gate*, the solo game started with you alone, gathering your party as you went. In stark contrast, *Icwind Dale* is grounded in players beginning the game with a full party of one to six characters. You can specify the party leader, who handles any conversations, and switch leaders when needed. If your elven mage is doing the talking, you'll get different responses than if

Icewind Dale

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Black Isle
Due date: Spring 2000
Perspective: Top-down
Party size: 1-6
Engine: Same as *Baldur's Gate II*
Multiplayer: Same as *Baldur's Gate II*



Icewind Dale is on the arctic frontier of the Forgotten Realms. This shows a portion of the snowy wasteland from preliminary concept art to finished game screens.

you use a dwarven fighter. Dialogue options are cued by the speaker's race, class, alignment, ability scores, and even gender. Some of these are controllable NPCs who may join the party's ranks, but won't appear in the roster.

There will be significantly more combat than puzzles, but there will still be plenty of "situational puzzles" where the character has to figure out the best approach to a problem. Like *Baldur's Gate*, the combat system is real-time with the option of pausing. New spells, items, and monsters, plus further improvements to the Infinity engine, will all help make this a very different game than *Baldur's Gate* in terms of feel.

SON OF THE MOTHER OF ONLINE RPGS: **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS**

When online gaming was still in its infancy — limited to MUDs, *Hundred Years War*, and a few others — there appeared Stormfront's *Neverwinter Nights* for America Online. It started in 1991

and ran continually for more than six years, offering the first graphical adventuring to a loyal audience that kept the game vital long after the technology got old. In a very real way, it set the standard for *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, *Asheron's Call*, and all subsequent online RPGs.

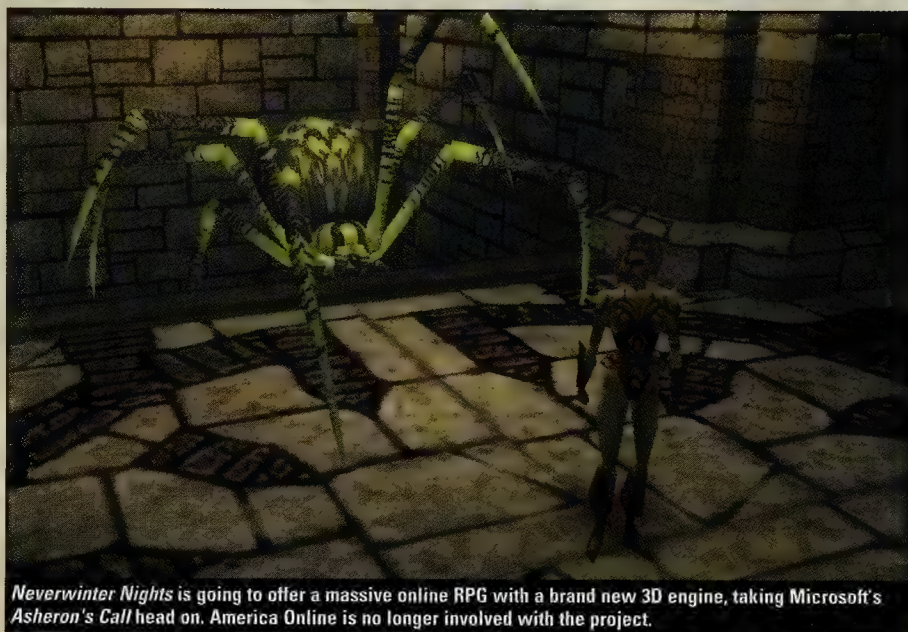
The new *Neverwinter Nights* has little to do with the old: new developer, new engine, and, thankfully, no connection at all to AOL. It's also very different than its three online competitors, as Producer Trent T. Oster of BioWare is eager to make clear: "We chose a different model than the other multiplayer RPGs, focusing on a smaller group of friends playing through a cooperative, story-based game. Our intent is to replicate the amazingly creative pen-and-paper D&D experience on the computer. We think this model will avoid the drawbacks associated with massively multiplayer worlds and reward our players with many hours of long-term, enjoyable gaming."

How do they intend to achieve these lofty goals? For starters, they're building the game on the back of a brand-new first-person 3D engine called Omen, complete with dynamic lighting and complex particle systems. The gameworld encompasses cities, dungeons, and forests, all of them full of both AI and real characters going about their daily business. It can be played as a straightforward solo adventure with a storyline, as a multiplayer version of the storyline game, or even in various deathmatch-style modes. But the heart of *Neverwinter Nights* is undoubtedly its highly customizable virtual Dungeon Master component.

Using *NWN* and its tools, one player can assume the role of Dungeon Master and others of adventurers, much as they would in the traditional pen-and-paper system. The DM is the final

Neverwinter Nights

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: BioWare
Due date: Winter 2000
Perspective: First person
Party size: Unlimited
Engine: Omen 3D engine
Multiplayer: Either straight co-op based on the storyline, or custom as created by the dungeon master. No fees.



Neverwinter Nights is going to offer a massive online RPG with a brand new 3D engine, taking Microsoft's *Asheron's Call* head on. America Online is no longer involved with the project.

"Our intent is to replicate the amazingly creative pen-and-paper D&D experience on the computer. We think this model will avoid the drawbacks associated with massively multiplayer worlds and reward our players with many hours of long-term, enjoyable gaming."

**TRENT T. OSTER, PRODUCER,
 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS**

authority and creative force of a game session, able to modify gameplay on the fly. By placing or removing objects, monsters, treasure, or even the gamers themselves, he crafts and controls the game the same way his pen-and-paper counterpart would, tweaking the difficulty levels as the party adventures. Using BioWare's fairly intuitive yet powerful Solstice Toolset, users can craft custom modules with elaborate scripting and complex interactions. These may then be loaded to the *NWN* server, where players connect and begin their adventure. There are no pay-to-play fees and no requirements to use the *neverwinter.net* service, so games can also be hosted privately. The plan is to deliver not just a game set in a D&D world, but a game that replicates D&D itself in a computer milieu.

ARMAGEDDON IN ENROTH:

MIGHT AND MAGIC: DAY OF THE DESTROYER

While the *Dungeons & Dragons* rules still dominate the world of RPGs, other old hands and young punks offer a different slant on fantasy realms and epic quests. One of the oldest is the *Might & Magic* series, which has been revitalized over the past few years first by the outstanding strategy games in the *Heroes of Might & Magic* series, and then by a return to form with the classic adventure *Might & Magic VI: Mandate of Heaven*. When *M&M6* started flying off the shelves so fast that some stores couldn't keep it in stock, it was clear that New World Computing and 3DO had a thoroughbred on their hands. *Might & Magic VII* following the next year, and while it didn't move the series forward, it did offer more of the addictive adventuring that distinguished *M&M6*.

New World is rolling full steam ahead with the eighth and ninth entries in the series, and though they no longer bear numbers, they continue the adventures in Enroth. First up will be *Might and Magic: Day of the Destroyer*, which is being built on a modified version of the *M&M6/7*

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Day of the Destroyer will be full of the expansive outdoor environments and living towns that made *Might & Magic IV* so good.

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**Might and Magic:
Day of the Destroyer**

Publisher: 3DO
Developer: New World Computing
Due date: Summer 2000
Perspective: First person
Party size: 5
Engine: Enhanced *Might & Magic IV* engine
Multiplayer: None

engine featuring new art and music, better animations and a widescreen view of the game-world. All that remains are the time-tested skill and combat systems.

Paul Rattner, Project Director, outlines the premise of *Day of the Destroyer*. "As the game begins, gateways to the elemental planes have opened onto Enroth," he says. "The forces of air, earth, fire, and water are unleashed upon the land, and ancient prophecies mark these times as the end of the world. Escaton the Destroyer is wiping the world clean so things may start again. The player begins the game on Jadame, a continent settled by monster kingdoms and tribes. Early in the game, the player learns of the elemental cataclysm as foretold in a Dark Elven prophecy. Armed with knowledge of the prophecy, the player and his party set out to bring about salvation. In the course of the game, you will forge a great alliance among the warring monster and humanoid factions of Jadame, prevent the fulfillment of prophetic events, close the elemental plane gateways, and discover the ancient origin of Escaton."

Day of The Destroyer begins with your customized character starting off alone. As he explores, a total of five NPC characters can join the party. These NPCs can be swapped in and out of the roster at inns, allowing the player to change party composition as the game unfolds. This return to an old-fashioned roster system places the gamer in complete control of the party-forming process. Once a character has been discovered,

that character will always be available for hire or dismissal. This means that a player can play as every class and race at some point in the game. The old Knight and Cleric classes are joined by the Troll, Minotaur, Vampire, Necromancer, Dark Elf, and Dragon classes, each with its own special abilities and powers. This means that, for the first time in a *Might & Magic* game, you can play as a monster, but for play-balance reasons, you cannot import characters from previous games into *Day of the Destroyer*.

EVERYBODY WAS MACRO FIGHTING:

SOULBRINGER

While the *D&D* games hearken back to classic tabletop sessions of yesteryear, and *Might & Magic* is like an old familiar friend, *Soulbringer* represents something entirely new for computer roleplaying. It veers furthest off the track to offer an odd and innovative third-person singular 3D game. The game is being developed in the UK by Gremlin (*Realms of the Haunting*), and though Gremlin was recently bought by Infogrames, it will be published by Interplay.

Rather than being set in the familiar high fantasy lands of other games, *Soulbringer* takes place in a dark, moody, almost Gothic setting. The story brings the game's hero to the small riverport town of Madrigal, where his uncle trains him in the mysteries of magic. Settings are unique in that they change and evolve in response to the player's successes and failures. Madrigal, for instance,

Soulbringer

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Gremlin
Due date: Spring 2000
Perspective: Third person
Party size: 1
Engine: 3D
Multiplayer: None



The most unique thing about Gremlin's *Soulbringer* is a combat system that allows you to make multiple commands and attacks into macros for rapid execution.

"*Soulbringer* is very much story-driven, with adventure game elements as well as RPG elements. More importantly, it doesn't rely on twitch reflexes to play: something that is missing from many of today's RPGs."

**DOUG AVERY, LINE PRODUCER,
SOULBRINGER**

evolves from a shanty town into a prosperous village during the course of your adventure.

As with any RPG, actions are based around a combination of quests related to the central plot and quests for fun and experience. For example, you must free the farmers of Madrigal from the slave mines hidden beyond the farms, enter a ruined city of the undead to steal important tomes, sneak or fight your way into the Guild of Assassins, sail to the magical isle of Rainbow Rock to recover the legendary ancestral hammer of the Bloodkin, and even travel to other worlds. And you'll do all this with just one character, sometimes aided by NPCs. At the beginning of the game, your character has very few skills; he starts off with odd jobs around town and works his way up to epic quests.

Soulbringer's most interesting element is its combat mechanism, which Doug Avery, Line Producer, describes in some detail. "Combat takes place in a real-time environment," he says. "As the game progresses, your character will learn new techniques that can be combined into more complex and powerful maneuvers. The combat consists of actions and macros. Every weapon has a set of actions. The higher your combat level, the more actions you get, and although the higher level actions are more complex, they are often also slower. You can set up 'chains' of actions in a macro. These can consist of any combination of any actions on any items you have. A macro may involve hitting someone twice with a shortsword, once with a longsword, and then eating an apple. Okay, that would be a silly macro, since you have to change weapons in the middle of a fight, but you can do it.

"You can engage an enemy by holding the engage button down, or trigger a macro, or pick your actions directly," Avery says. "If you trigger a macro, the character will time his actions for best effect. If you don't, then you have to control the timing yourself." Bracketing this innovative combat engine is a potent magic system based around the elemental spheres of Air, Earth, Water, Fire, and Spirit. As the game progresses, you can choose to concentrate on one ele-



There isn't any question that *Might and Magic: Day of the Destroyer* will have rock solid gameplay, but the engine is starting to look a little long in the teeth.

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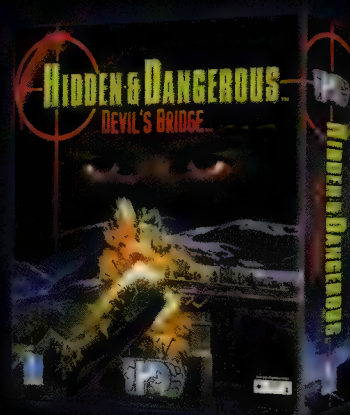


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mental sphere for maximum power, or spread your expertise among several.

"*Soulbringer* is very much story-driven, with adventure game elements as well as RPG elements," Avery says. "More importantly, it doesn't rely on twitch reflexes to play: something that is missing from many of today's RPGs."

FREESPACE AS RPG:

SUMMONER

Hot off the success of *Freespace 2*, developer Volition is turning its prodigious talents toward a roleplaying epic called *Summoner*. Imagine a first-person RPG using elements of the *Freespace* engine, and you have some idea of what's in store.

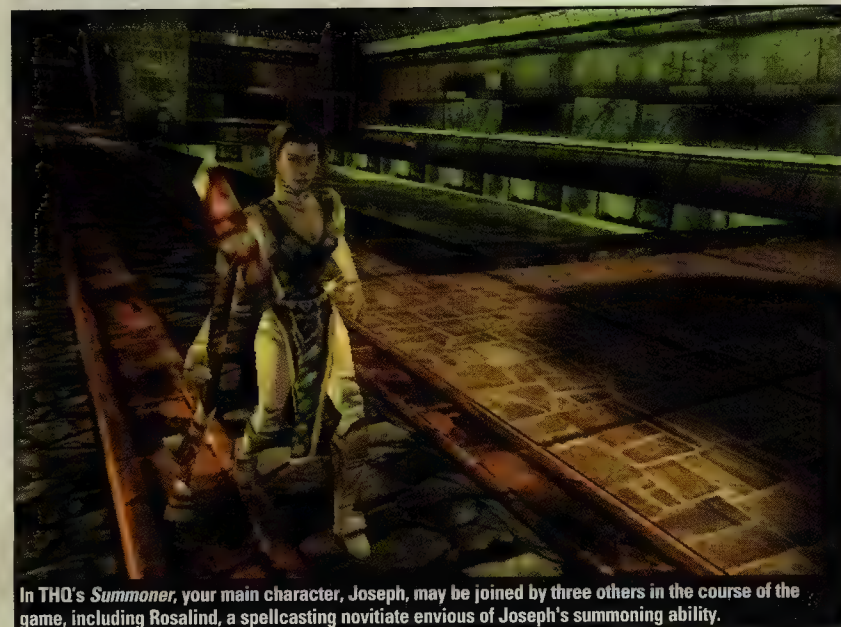
The story follows Joseph, born with the ability to summon creatures to fight for him. As a young boy, he inadvertently summoned a demon he couldn't control. This demon destroyed Joseph's village, and since that time he has forsaken his summoning ability. He's living a peaceful life as a farmer in Medeva when Orenian soldiers attack, forcing him to use his summoning skills to defeat the evil king Murad of Orenia.

Plot and party composition are tightly scripted. During your travels three adventurers will join your little gang: Fleece, a skilled thief who joins Joseph in the hopes of finding treasure; the warrior Jekhar, forced to aid Joseph by his king; and Rosalind, a spellcasting novitiate envious of Joseph's summoning ability. The different attitudes of this party are important to the plot, creating interesting tensions among its members. The core quest is to find four rings that can destroy Murad, with plenty of sub-quests along the way.

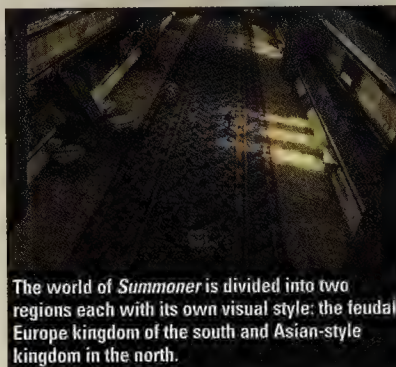
Despite this elaborate set-up, *Summoner*

Summoner

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Volition
Due date: Fall 2000
Perspective: Third person
Party size: 1-4
Engine: 3D
Multiplayer: None



In THQ's *Summoner*, your main character, Joseph, may be joined by three others in the course of the game, including Rosalind, a spellcasting novitiate envious of Joseph's summoning ability.



The world of *Summoner* is divided into two regions each with its own visual style: the feudal Europe kingdom of the south and Asian-style kingdom in the north.

"We're not trying to make a completely hack and slash game, but you will definitely see a fair amount of combat. Our goal is to make sure that combat is never boring, from the start of the game to the last battle."

**ANOOP SHEKAR, ASSISTANT PRODUCER,
 SUMMONER**

will still be a game very much focused on combat, as Volition Assistant Producer Anoop Shekar readily admits. "We're not trying to make a completely hack and slash game, but you will definitely see a fair amount of combat," he says. "The combat is completely real-time and pauseable. Our goal is to make sure that combat is never boring, from the start of the game to the last battle. All of the characters in your party will be able to cast spells. On top of this, Joseph also has the ability to summon creatures to aid him in battle. When a creature is summoned, it acts as a fifth party member."

IT'S NOT *DIABLO*, REALLY:

NOX

Nox is not like *Diablo*.

Westwood takes great pains to point this out every chance it gets, but it's a losing battle. *Nox* looks a hell of a lot like *Diablo* due to its perspective and visual style. It's a superficial resem-

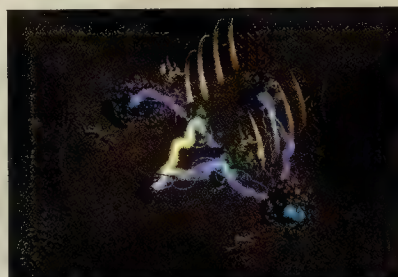
blance, but then we're a superficial society. In fact, the two games play quite differently. *Nox* is akin to a top-down view of a first-person shooter: fast-paced and combat-heavy.

"*Nox* is an action game with some RPG elements," says executive producer John Hight. "A player can develop their own unique style of play by combining spells. For instance, one of the guys in our office likes to cast 'Shock' on himself then 'Teleport to Target' to a player running away from the battle. He becomes a statically charged human missile."

You play a guy named Jack Mower: an average schlub from a Florida trailer park who gets catapulted (along with his TV) through a dimensional wormhole. On the other side is *Nox*, a world split between the necromancers of the north and human warriors of the south. Following a brutal war that leaves the souls of the necromancers sealed in the Staff of Oblivion, the people of the south divide into three factions. The Warriors eschew magic, the Wizards blend magic and technology, and the Conjurers practice "natural" magic. Into this realm comes Hecubah, a vengeful child of the north who seeks to release the souls of her people and destroy the south once and for all.

As Jack, you can choose to play as either Warrior, Wizard, or Conjurer. These are carefully designed and balanced classes, with level increases providing additional abilities and increases to basic stats. Combat success is tied to mouse dexterity; to attack with a melee weapon (such as a sword, staff or mace), you move Jack close to an enemy and click on or in the direction of your target. Jack will respond by striking each time you click, or firing from afar if equipped with a ranged weapon.

Like *Quake*, a good deal of the appeal of *Nox* comes from its frenetic multiplayer modes, such as Arena, King of the Realm, Elimination, Capture the Flag, and Nox Ball. These move fast, with sophisticated line of sight and shadowing providing a tense, rich atmosphere. As Michael Booth, technical director and creator of *Nox*, says, "The main influences for *Nox* were Atari's *Gauntlet* and the *Magic: The Gathering* card game. In practical terms, we are in the medieval fantasy genre, and certain things such as Warriors,



Nox will play more as an action game with RPG elements than as a straight RPG, according to executive producer John Hight.

Nox

Publisher: Westwood
Developer: Westwood
Due date: Spring 2000
Perspective: top-down
Party size: TBD
Engine: 2D & 3D
Multiplayer: Massively multiplayer Arena, King of the Realm, Elimination, Capture the Flag and Nox Ball

Wizards, and Ogres are part of the package. However, the gameplay of *Nox* and *Diablo* is extremely different, especially in multiplayer."

TIM CAIN'S EPIC QUEST

ARCANUM

If you played *Fallout*, then you know that designer Tim Cain has a talent for creating deep roleplaying experiences. After Cain and his colleagues Leonard Boyarsky and Jason Anderson left Interplay in 1998, they formed Troika Games. Soon joined by a sizable chunk of the *Fallout* team, Troika began laboring over its first project: a deep RPG series called *Arcanum* to be published by Sierra. Its bizarre hybrid fantasy-industrial setting places it at the forefront of RPGs that challenge the definitions of the genre.

Cain sees *Arcanum* as a continuation of the depth of play and world-building that distinguished *Fallout*. One element that made *Fallout* strong was the deep character development, and *Arcanum* is taking this even farther by completely removing classes and restrictions. There are eight basic stats, more than a dozen derived stats (poison resistance, character speed, etc), 16 primary skills (such as gambling, healing, and lock-picking), 80 spells within 16 colleges, and 56 technological degrees within eight disciplines. Whew — and that's all *before* the game starts.

The player creates a main character and is then joined by NPCs in the course of the game. "All of them will have their own agendas that might be at odds with the player's," says Cain. "They will be watching the player's alignment to make sure it doesn't vary too much from their own, and will leave if the difference in their alignments is too great. Or they just might turn on the player when they get fed up with him. We want the followers to act as if they are truly autonomous characters. It's not so much a party system as a single-player system with associated NPCs."

The combat system is offered as both real-time, wherein attacks are as fast as the animation allows, and as a turn-based, action-point system similar to *Fallout*'s. Both systems have similar results in that the character with a higher dexterity and faster weapon speed can attack more frequently than a slower character, with no real advantage to either. Magic is divided among numerous colleges, each with different characteristics and unique spells types. "Each spell drains the caster's fatigue," Cain says, "and when fatigue reaches zero, the caster will fall unconscious. Fatigue is recovered fairly quickly (much faster than hit points), but it can be drained by other means as well, like running, fighting, or even walking while heavily encumbered."

The gameworld is an interesting amalgam of Tolkienesque fantasy and 19th century industrial Europe, where technology is on the rise, and magic on the decline. "As far as quests go," says Cain, "we feel that the presentation of the quests is almost as important as the quests themselves."

Arcanum

Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Troika
Due date: Summer 2000
Perspective: Top down
Party size: 1 main plus NPCs
Engine: 2D

Multiplayer: Tim Cain was coy in his answer: "An incredibly massive and unique multiplayer component, but for now I'd prefer to leave it at that."



Arcanum won't have a traditional RPG setting — instead, the game will take place in a world that mixes fantasy and industrial 19th century Europe.

We like to assure that even the most straightforward 'rescuing the princess' quest can be given numerous twists and turns."

TOTAL ROLEPLAYING:

DUNGEON SIEGE

Since Chris Taylor is the man behind *Total Annihilation*, it should come as little surprise that his take on the RPG should have a very real-time strategy spin to it. "*Dungeon Siege* is an action fantasy roleplaying game with some of our favorite elements taken from RTS," Taylor says. "For the most part, action FRPG games focus on one central character. We allow the player to create a party. We believe that a good dungeon experience is about a bunch of characters with different skills and abilities charging into the dungeons and raising hell."

To better manage an adventuring party, Taylor and his team at Gas Powered Games are borrowing some of the mechanics of the RTS. Each character can be ordered to execute very specific commands that will be familiar to players of *Total Annihilation*. The game can be paused at any point so that characters can be given specific commands. Each combat encounter can be player-controlled and micro-managed or executed using higher level attack orders.

Though the setting and story are still in development, the gameworld is a massive, con-

"For the most part, action FRPG games focus on one central character. We allow the player to create a party. We believe that a good dungeon experience is about a bunch of characters with different skills and abilities charging into the dungeons and raising hell."

**CHRIS TAYLOR, LEAD DESIGNER,
DUNGEON SIEGE**

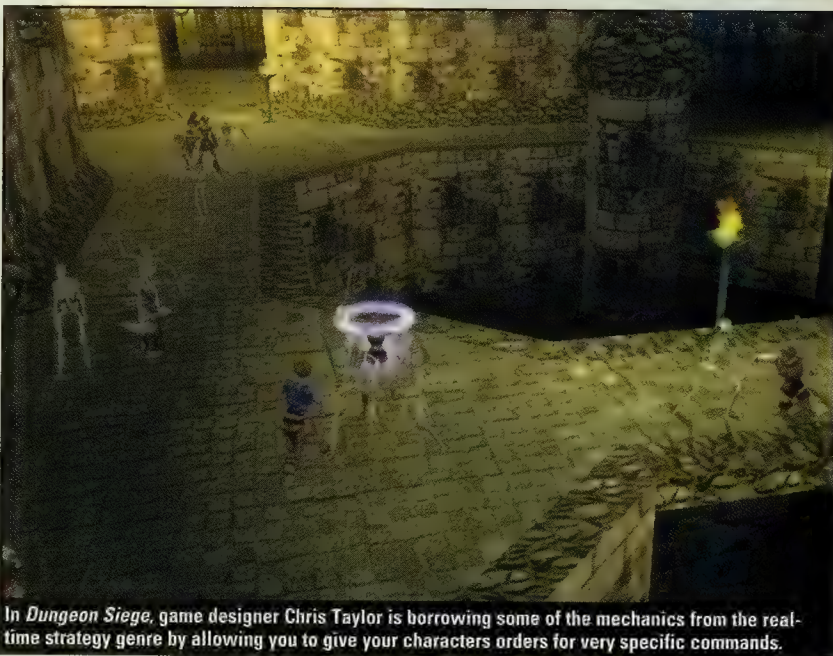
tiguous, completely 3D landscape of both surface and underground realms. Beyond the highly customizable game setup, the *Dungeon Siege* environment can be further modified using the "Siege Editor," which the team uses to build the world, place monsters and treasure, insert story sequences, and control elements such as wind, snow and rain. The Siege Editor can be used to create single or multiplayer worlds. A large set of Siege Nodes allows users to quickly build indoor and outdoor areas by providing them with pre-made chunks of the environment.

All narrative is accomplished fully in-game at certain trigger points, with all the minor quests woven into one giant adventure. The player begins with the Hero character and picks up party members along the way. Some will volunteer while others are available for hire as mercenaries. "The size and diversity of the players party is entirely up to them," Taylor says. "This flexibility is something that we believe makes the experience different for everyone that plays. Our goal is to push the battles to the edge and drive the excitement to the highest level seen in an action FRPG."

PCG

Dungeon Siege

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Gas Powered Games
Due date: Fall 2000
Perspective: Top down
Party size: 1 plus NPCs
Engine: 3D
Multiplayer: In the works



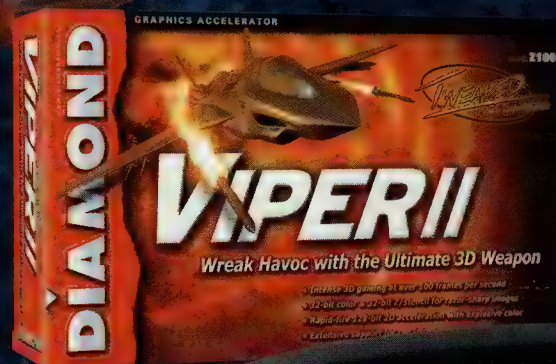
In *Dungeon Siege*, game designer Chris Taylor is borrowing some of the mechanics from the real-time strategy genre by allowing you to give your characters orders for very specific commands.

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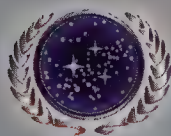


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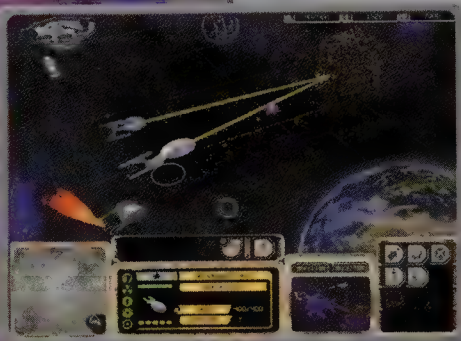


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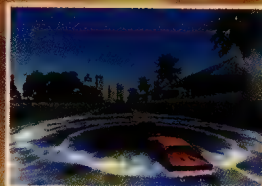
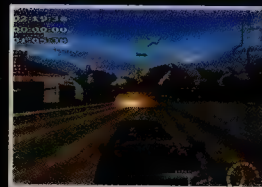
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Distributed by:



The Real Future of Gaming...

Recently, *PC Gamer* staffers Dan Morris and Jeremy Williams took a trip down Memory Lane for a reunion with the grandfather of games, *Pong*. Forsaking the stacks of cutting-edge new releases that clutter our offices (including the 3D *Pong* update from Hasbro), Dan and Jeremy found a Java version of classic, black-and-white *Pong* on the Web and commenced play.

Back and forth they batted the little white ball with their on-screen paddles (though their use of Microsoft Sidewinder gamepads was a concession to modern times).

The somewhat limited strategies available to a *Pong* player — i.e., hit the ball with a corner of the paddle to change its angle, and really that's the only strategy — made the boys a target for ridicule and jackalization. They bravely soldiered on, even as the rumbling sounds from editors playing *Unreal Tournament* or some other such "new-fangled" title was drowning out their game.

Through tense, white-knuckled

sessions, Dan and Jeremy rediscovered the brilliant simplicity of the original videogame. They began coining a new *Pong* lingo replete with terms like "skulling" and "sandwiching the edge" and "bounce-blasting," understandable only to each other in the way that those psycho murderous New Zealand girls had their special language. The

rest of the staff watched Dan and Jeremy sink hours into their crude little Java *Pong* rivalry, and could only shake their heads sadly.

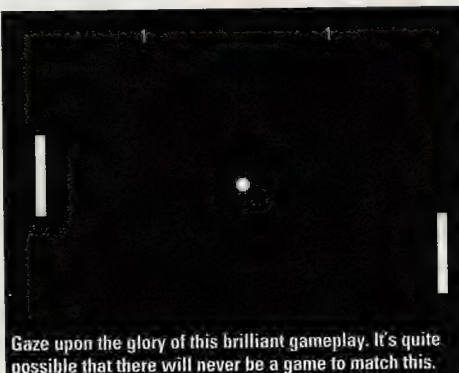
"This is, quite simply, the best game ever developed," Morris said with conviction.

"No one ever improved on this design. It's

been all downhill since *Pong*."

"Truly," Williams added, with a knowing, sober nod. "Truly."

What will become of this strange obsession, no one yet knows. For our parts, we only hope these two talented editors can recover their senses and once again enjoy a game featuring such modernities as color, sound, and shapes more complex than a square.



Gaze upon the glory of this brilliant gameplay. It's quite possible that there will never be a game to match this.

Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the least you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll really need.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

100%-90% CLASSIC

Not many games can earn a rating higher than 90%, and even fewer can approach the magic 100. Anything that we rate higher than 90% is an instant classic — a game that's truly significant in both content and design, and one that we'd recommend without reservation to anyone interested in PC gaming.

89%-80% EXCELLENT

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your attention, though it may not make any significant advances over its rivals. Also, some genuine benchmark games of decidedly specialist taste will fall into this area — it may be the best 7th Cavalry simulation on the market, but not all of us want to relive Little Bighorn.

79%-70% VERY GOOD

These are pretty good games, which we would recommend to fans of the particular genre —

although it's a safe bet that there are probably better games out there.

69%-60% GOOD

A reasonable, above-average game. It may be worth buying, but probably has a few significant flaws that keep it from earning a higher rating.

59%-50% FAIR

Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but not a very good way to spend your gaming dollar, either.

49%-40% BELOW AVERAGE

Poor quality. Only a few, slightly redeeming features keep them from falling into the abyss of the next category....

39%-0% DON'T BOTHER

Just terrible games — and the lower you go, the worse they get. Avoid these titles like the plague — and don't say we didn't warn you!

GAME OF THE MONTH

Each issue, we give out the prestigious *PC Gamer* Game of the Month award to the one new title that stands out, head and shoulders, above the rest of the month's releases. Aaaaand this month, our winner is...



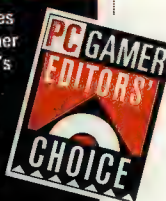
HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE



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EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or higher — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.



AGE OF WONDERS



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FLANKER 2.0



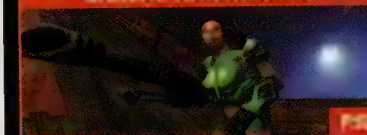
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SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE



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UNREAL TOURNAMENT



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WHEEL OF TIME



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Half-Life: Opposing Force

CATEGORY: Action **DEVELOPER:** Gearbox Software **PUBLISHER:** Sierra Studios, (800) 545-7677, www.sierra.com **REQUIRED:** P133, 24MB RAM, 125MB hard-drive space, *Half-Life* **WE RECOMMEND:** P300, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, IPX, Modem, Free Internet play: WON.net, Maximum players: 32

So much more than just an expansion pack, *Opposing Force* is a worthy follow-up to the best PC game ever made.

As regular *PC Gamer* readers will know, our reviews section is reserved for complete games, while expansion packs are left to the scrutiny of Tom McDonald's Extended Play column. In fact, *Half-Life: Opposing Force* is only the second expansion pack in our five-year history to receive a full review (after *Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith*), but our experience with it convinced us that it deserved our full attention. The impressive length, innovative perspective, and dynamite level design make *Opposing Force* the undisputed expansion pack of the year, and a strong contender for best game, period.

It should be a foregone conclusion that last year's undisputed "Game of the Year" has found a happy home on each of our readers' hard-drives, but let's review for the sake of that overworked patent lawyer who still hasn't played *Half-Life*:

It was another stimulating day at the subterranean Black Mesa Research Facility. The loyal staff of privileged scientists at the Sector C Test Labs arrived for work in anticipation of another in a series

of attempts to create a "resonance cascade."

A mysterious "sample" delivered that morning by military escort created quite a buzz, and the lead scientists were under pressure from the administrator to deliver success.

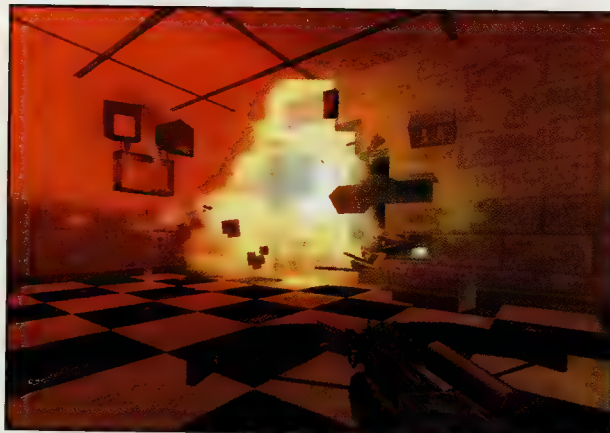
Pressure, it seems, that was applied too hard.

Stark pandemonium struck the facility when a malfunction opened a pan-dimensional rift through which hostile aliens entered our world.

Gordon Freeman, a scientist who aided in the dreadful incident, awoke from unconsciousness to a Black Mesa wrought with destruction and chaos. Aliens were terrorizing — and mutating — his fellow humans. Armed with a crowbar and whatever weapons he could scavenge, Gordon slowly crept toward the surface. Eventually, the cavalry arrived in the form of a crack military unit sent to rescue the Black Mesa stuff.

Or so it seemed. Before his astonished eyes, shadowy US marines assassinated Gordon's innocent colleagues. The armed grunts were not there to rescue, but to cleanse and silence. Stunned, terrified and enraged, Gordon silently calculated his escape strategy. Trusting no one.

The rest, as they say, is gaming history. Gordon, with our help, evacuated the facility, traveled to the alien world of Xen, conquered the alien threat, and



■ "Stand back from the Maintenance Access door. We're going to blow it!"

saved the world — and his own neck — in the process. A final cryptic encounter with a mysterious government agent served to draw the curtain on the story, leaving unanswered questions and a neon vacancy sign for a sequel.

It was only a matter of time before that space was filled, but we were skeptical that the follow-up would live up to the intriguing plot and design quality of the original. To our great surprise and satisfaction, *Opposing Force* surpasses every expectation. Just as *Half-Life* set a new precedent for action games, *Opposing Force* raises the bar for expansion packs.

Leaving conventional sequels in the trenches, *Opposing Force* takes place during the action we experienced in *Half-Life*. This time the player fills the role of Marine Corporal Adrian Shephard, sent to the Black Mesa facility to execute

COMRADES IN ARMS

Working as a unit, the good people of the Marine Corps can accomplish anything. As a Corporal, Shephard usually has command. Learn to respect your fellow servicemen because you can't win the game without them.



Forget about asking Barney to open doors. The **Engineer** can cut his own.



A master of the shotgun and machine gun, the **Soldier** is also equipped with grenades.



Otherwise known as The Almighty Savior in the field, the highly skilled **Medic** will cure anything short of gangrene.



This Marine is so elite he's not even in the manual. All we know is he carries a SAW machine gun, which makes him okay by us.



■ It's only a matter of time before he notices my puny bullets. At this point, we might as well say a prayer and hit that "quick-load" key.

Gordon Freeman in the wake of the resonance cascade. So hang up your bleached scientific gown, maggots, and strap on those army boots — because you're headed for Boot Camp.

No kidding, either. Boot Camp replaces the original game's Hazard Course training exercise, and is not to be overlooked. Overbearing drill sergeants set the tone for the player's new callous persona. "Where are you from, soldier," Drill Instructor Dwight T. Barnes asks another member of your platoon. "Texas? Holy cow, you know what comes from Texas, don't you?" he remarks, tipping his hat to Stanley Kubrick.

Luckily, Shephard won't have to endure months of basic training. For our sake, he's been bumped to the top of the advanced training list. It's a twenty-minute crash course that should be more than adequate for any *Half-Life* veteran.

The full game begins with an opening segment every bit as original and atmospheric as the groundbreaking intro from *Half-Life*, though not nearly as long. Enroute by air to the Black Mesa facility, Shephard and his wisecracking squadmates are suddenly struck by an alien craft and forced to crash land. After coming around from unconsciousness, Shephard finds that a scientist has rescued him from alien autopsy, and we're off and running.

Not ten minutes into the game, the now-infamous order is received via radio: "Forget about Freeman." The alien threat

is too much, and all marines are ordered to pull out. But in a brilliant scripted scene, Shephard just misses the last helicopter transport out, and suddenly the player's M.O. is simply survival, which proves to be a great sport of its own. It turns out that Freeman didn't encounter all of the creatures that crossed into our world. In addition to most of the ones we're familiar with, *Opposing Force* introduces about ten new aliens, all of which have a penchant for human flesh. Some run as fast as Shephard, while others use organic firearms that continue to attack once their owner is eliminated.

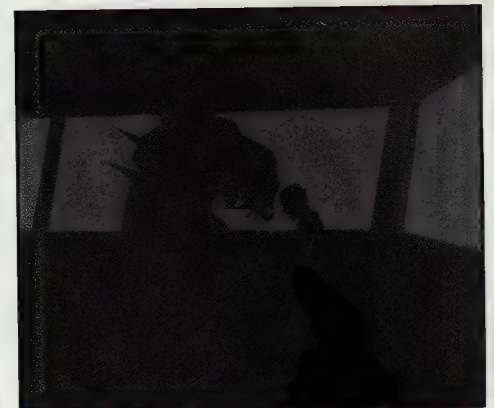
Another — perhaps the most frightening — represents a further stage of head crab mutation. It spits innards from its stomach and flails its claws maniacally as it runs in your direction.

Shephard, like

Freeman, also runs into human opposition. As before, they prove to be every bit as formidable as any abomination from Xen. Known simply as Black Ops, these black-clad ninja types represent another battalion covertly sent in by the government with their own set of objectives, and they have little respect for "grunts" like Shephard. Wanting just to deliver their mysterious and malevolent "package" and get the hell out, they'll execute nosy Marines on sight. Maneuvering through their lairs can be hairy, and will require frequent use of the quick-save key.

Thankfully, Shephard is not alone in his struggle. At key points in the game,

To our great surprise and satisfaction, *Opposing Force* surpasses every expectation.



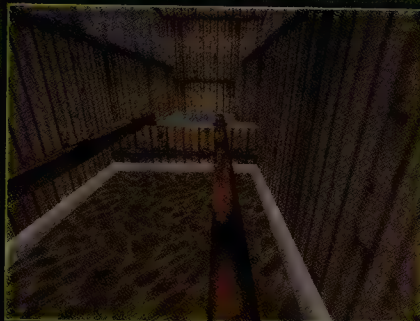
■ Never missing a beat, the new security guard, Otis, offers wit and commentary while slaying a bad guy (top). After the scene above doesn't turn out well, Otis pipes in with, "Poor bastards."

Boot Camp

If there is a Hell on Earth, it can be found in Marine Boot Camp. The new training mission drops the player smack into the thick of it, and makes no apologies. Get used to it, maggot. Lives are at stake. By the time you're through here, you'll be "eating danger and crapping victory!"

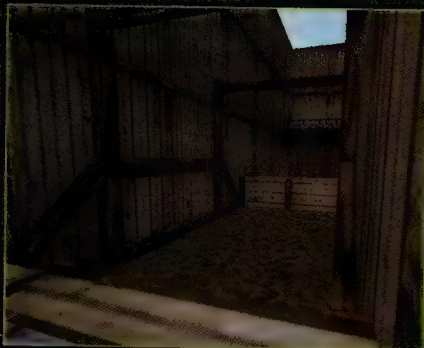
BASIC TRAINING

Familiar with the duck and jump keys? You better get real friendly because the Sarge won't stand for your insubordination.



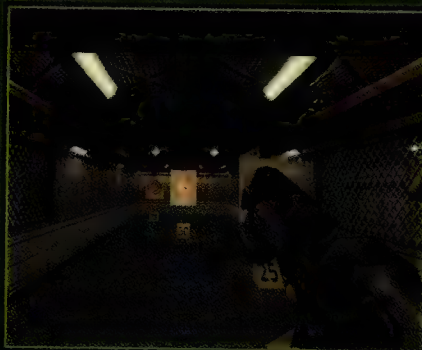
ROPES COURSE

The clever programmers at Gearbox have put in some overtime and added swinging ropes to the *Half-Life* engine. It takes practice, but you'll get the hang of it.



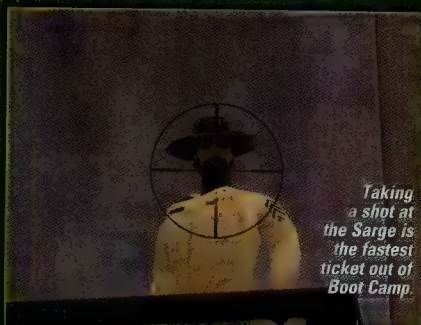
PISTOL RANGE

Just like an old shooting gallery — only with a live .357 Desert Eagle with a laser sight. Six shots in the center of each target lets you move on.



SNIPER RANGE

The most elegant weapon of the bunch, the sniper rifle takes a few seconds to load after each shot, so place your bullets well.



he happens upon other stranded marines from his platoon who will assist and fight alongside him. The friendly officers specialize in a variety of classes, including a Heavy Machine Gunner and a Medic who can provide much-needed first aid. The Engineer is helpful in opening locked doors with his blowtorch.

Typically though, all the human soldiers in the game exhibit terrific intelligence. Remember how terrifyingly smart they were in *Half-Life*? Well, now that AI is on your side, and it makes a real difference when the chips are down. When injured, they'll retreat under cover of friendly fire, peer around corners, and lob grenades over obstacles. They'll even duck and cover their heads if a grenade falls nearby. Best of all, they're ace sharpshooters. As the ranking officer, Shephard can command his units to stay and guard specific areas or cover his six. Friendly soldiers will only go so far, however — they'll stop following Shephard at certain designated points, so don't rely on them too much.

Had this been released as a full-price, stand-alone sequel, I doubt many people would have complained.

Working alone is not as futile as it may seem. Once Shephard scavenges a few decent weapons, he becomes a resourceful fighting machine. Even his lowly wrench packs a wallop far fiercer than the old crowbar. Remember, Shephard has muscles in places where Freeman never even knew he had places. The .357 Desert Eagle with its affixed laser sight is extremely useful, while the stealthy sniper rifle is just plain fun. Another new weapon, the belt-fed SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon), is simply the most blazingly cool machine gun since the M56 Smart Gun from *Aliens*.

Additionally, plenty of extraterrestrial firearms make their debuts. Most unique among them is a machine that fires an orb of teleportational goodness capable of warping anything in its path to another dimension. The secondary fire button actually teleports Shephard to a small corner of Xen replete with health and ammunition. When ready to return, a warp gate is available to throw him back into battle.

As for level design, *Opposing Force* is the most detailed and diverse 3D action game since...well, since *Half-Life*. Thankfully, Shephard is not made to wander through any one environment for an unnecessary length of time. Among other settings, he'll explore labs and wide open spaces on the surface, scale cliffs, dive under water, and immerse himself in pitch-black underground tunnels. And mercifully, there's very little Xen in the game — just one very short trip is made; a thoughtful reaction from Gearbox to player criticisms that the alien dimension was the least fun part of the original *Half-Life*.

Half-Life purists should be ready to make one major concession. *Opposing*



■ First rule of combat training: never let the enemy take the high ground.

Force has many more puzzles than the original and may require die-hard first-person shooter to dig a little deeper into their gray matter than they previously had to. Instead of wildly shooting clusters of enemies over and over, Gearbox opted to break up the action with environmental brainteasers. If you liked *Half-Life* more for its action than for its crate-shoving and jumping antics, there's a chance you'll be disappointed by *Opposing Force*. The *Half-Life* vets here at PC Gamer have all welcomed the extra challenge, however.

Something else that *Half-Life* fans will appreciate is the way in which *Opposing Force* cleverly references back to the first game time and time again. Since this mission takes place at the same time as the events of the original, you'll see a lot of familiar events replayed from an all-new perspective. You'll even bump into your old alter ego Gordon Freeman! One of the luxuries Gearbox had with doing *Opposing Force* as an add-on pack is that it allowed them to assume a much closer familiarity with the events of the first game than would be permitted with a stand-alone sequel. Gearbox really seized this opportunity, and everyone who paid close attention to the little details in *Half-Life* will be rewarded handsomely for it here.

One strange inconsistency some have noted is the reaction the scientists have to Shephard. Freeman remembers a research facility swarming with militia sent to hunt down human survivors. The scientists should be hiding in the floorboards, but for some strange reason they show little fear of Shephard. In fact, they're so kind as to offer a shot from a hypodermic when he is wounded. Of course, the player is free to execute any egghead he pleases.

Bad endings have been the downfall of a hundred good games. They're an insult to the rest of the adventure, and can ruin all that's come before. Unfortunately, the ending to *Opposing Force* is mediocre and anti-climactic at best. The showdown with the final boss creature is little more than a disappointing exercise in puzzle-solving. While such conundrums serve a great purpose in the middle of the game, an action title should have bookends of fiery missile-launching death. There is one final encounter with the mysterious G-Man, but it doesn't tie things together.



■ This sinister Black Op is every bit as deadly as the Marines from *Half-Life*. Watch your step.

As terrific as the single-player experience is, multi-player hasn't been overlooked. Again departing from the norm, Gearbox contracted elite mercenary level designers to do their dirty work for them. Designers include Ritual's famed "Levelord" and Tom "Paradox" Mustaine, as well as David "Kevlar" Kelvin of Legend Entertainment. The result is thirteen original maps, each with its own look and feel, custom-designed for the new *Opposing Force* weapons. While we'd love to see additional modes of play, the terrific single-player experience more than compensates.

In short, *Half-Life: Opposing Force* grabs the player's attention with the strength of an alien-possessed Marine and steadfastly refuses to let go. It's so good that, had this been released as a full-price, stand-alone sequel, I doubt many people would have complained. We can only wish that most complete games were so well-designed, and applaud Gearbox for living up to such incredibly high expectations.

Now, Valve, about *Half-Life 2*....

—Jeremy Williams

Around the Office

Here's what the rest of PC Gamer's *Opposing Force* veterans think...

"Having played *Half-Life* to completion several times, I've been itching for a chance to return to Black Mesa. And *Opposing Force* delivers exactly that with incredible style — I'm amazed that Gearbox managed to not only match but surpass the standards set by Valve's classic original."



GARY

"The biggest achievement with this expansion pack is that it stays completely true to what everyone loved best about the original...a strong, compelling story. By adding to the tale, and in fact dove-tailing with its continuity, there's just more of that great story to explore."



DAN

"*Half-Life: Opposing Force* is as close to a perfect single-player 3D action game as I have ever played. It took me ten minutes of play to come to this conclusion, and another thirty to decide that this was one of the single best gameplaying experiences I've ever had, period. It's got just the right balance of action, puzzles, and story to keep me begging for more. *Half-Life* kept me up night after night, and *Opposing Force* has been doing the same."



JJ

"New weapons. New allies. New enemies. Same great gaming experience. What more could you want from an add-on pack? *Opposing Force* is so good, they could have released it as *Half-Life 2*, and I sure wouldn't have voiced any complaints. This is one add-on that is definitely worth the money."



DEAN

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Solid level design; great squad combat; more *Half-Life*!

LOWS: Minor inconsistencies with the original; a somewhat dull ending (but it leaves the story wide open).

BOTTOM LINE: The best expansion pack ever, and a worthy sequel to Game of the Year.

94%



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I. *** SUPER-TERRORISM AND THE MANIPULATION OF THE HUMAN SPECIES.

I. Since the 1990's, technology available to terrorists has improved, the scope of their destruction has expanded. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
Sources say Deus Ex was created by Ion Storm to uncover the truth. Some say it's merely the latest conspiracy fueled by a madman. And some say it's a future training tool made to look like a hyperrealistic 3-D roleplaying computer game. Whatever it is, proceed with caution. They know you want it.

II. A recent pandemic, popularly referred to as the "Gray Death", has made an already chaotic world situation even worse. According to a report by the Federal Disease Control Center, it is the worst virus since AIDS. It is not yet known what compounds make up this deadly virus, but current data shows ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ are likely candidates. Ambrosia, the virus' stabilizer, has been linked to VersaLife. What is significant about the number 12? Does UNATCO maintain control over Ambrosia distribution? ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ can only mean www.unatco.com.

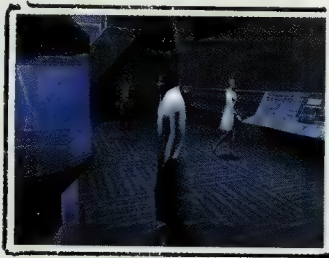


Fig. 2.5
Interact with 100's of characters.



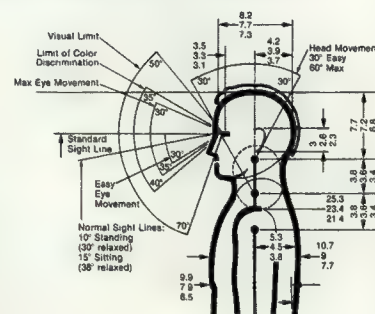
Fig. 2.4
Do not attempt to use small arms



Fig. 2.3
Be a generalist or a specialist



Item No. 14428 562



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Fig. 2.2
25 weapon types known.



Fig. 2.1
Travel through New York to Hong Kong

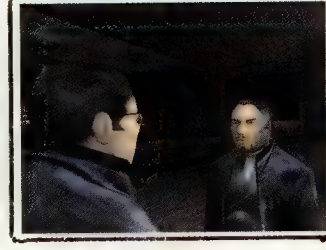


Fig. 2.6 Advanced AI and conversation systems.
These people are real!

No. 34561

III. J.C Denton is a powerful, nano-augmented agent for an anti-terrorist organization. Little is known about this person, but it seems that he is on a mission. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~. He works for UNATCO but what side he is working for is inconclusive at the moment. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

~~XXXXX~~ Can he be the one to save this world from complete annihilation?

****URGENT****

MO6-MO9: Get augmentations functioning again!
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

- a. Subdermal (2)
- b. Cranial (1)
- c. Eyes (1)
- d. Torso (3)
- e. Arms (1)
- f. legs (1)



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DEUS EX
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Ultima IX: Ascension

CATEGORY: Roleplaying **DEVELOPER:** Origin Systems **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts, (650) 628-1001, www.ea.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 8x CD-ROM drive, 8MB 3D graphics accelerator, DirectX 7-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 400, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB hard-drive space, 16MB Voodoo 3 graphics accelerator, EAX-supported sound card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

How can a game be so flawed, yet so brilliant?
The long-awaited next title in Origin's Ultima series is the answer.

Playing *Ultima IX: Ascension* is like eating wax cake. It looks delicious and appetizing, but after the first bite it's anything but delicious. *Ultima IX* is undoubtedly the most eagerly anticipated roleplaying game of the last several years. Since Origin first announced it was working on the ninth game in the series, fans have been slaving for every tidbit of information they could lay their hands on. Now it's here, and players all over the country are wailing with frustration and anger.

The reason? Quite simply, the game was designed from the ground up for the 3dfx Voodoo accelerator. But because it couldn't release the game as Glide-only, Origin had no choice but to include Direct3D support for the multitude of non-Glide video cards out there. Unfortunately, in Direct3D mode the game runs about as fast as a pregnant sloth, even on a PIII running with a TNT2.

Needless to say, the high system



■ Here's the castle of Lord British, in all its glory.

requirements don't help the game's playability factor; while it's possible to play it on a D3D card, it's certainly not preferable. And then there are the bugs. The god awful bugs. *Ultima IX* is as bug-ridden as an Ethiopian outhouse, and some of them will crash the game altogether. The most common bug is the one that crashes the game while trying to load a saved game—I haven't played a single session without having to restart and reload at least twice. There are also bugs with clipping and inventory management.

Of course, you've already probably looked toward the end of this review and seen the final score. "80 percent?" you thought to yourself. "Why would he say it's a bug-filled travesty, and then give it an 80 percent?" Well, the answer is simple—despite its technical ills, this is still, hands down, one of the best roleplaying games ever created. The game begins with the Avatar minding his own business in his house on Earth. After collect-

ing the necessary items, talking to a gypsy, and stepping through the gate, you find yourself in a Britannia in which the eight Virtues have been corrupted. Now it's up to you to search out mysterious pillars formed by the Guardian, and restore the shrines of Britannia so that the Virtues will again flourish.

Ultima IX's gameworld is gigantic, and the Avatar will travel from one end of Britannia to the other. He'll control ships, teleport to locations, repair light-houses, and, of course, combat a plethora of creatures bent on his destruction. The 3D support problem has a simple origin—the graphics are downright incredible. Vistas from the top of promontories inspire awe. Textures in dungeons and cities are always new and fresh. And spell effects will cause tingles to run up and down your spine.

Viewing the action from a third-person perspective, players manipulate a centrally fixed cursor to pick up items, initiate conversations, aim spells and ranged weapons, and use objects. Hotkeys give access to everything, including the Journal, which stores clues and

MY KINGDOM FOR PEST CONTROL!

One of the worst signs of a company releasing a game early is a "known problems" list within the README.TXT file. For *Ultima IX*, some of the gems to watch for include the following:

IF YOU GO SWIMMING in combat mode, you won't be able to sheath your weapon until you get back on dry land. You also won't be able to use objects in the world in this state, unless you go into hand mode.

IF YOUR LAST SAVE GAME has a problem loading, you may not be able to get into the game, since *Ascension* automatically loads the last save game. To suppress the automatic loading of the last save game, go into your SAVE-GAME directory and delete the file "START.DAT".

WE RECOMMEND that you not save the game while you're poisoned; this has been somewhat problematic in the current version.

IF YOU DRAG AN ICON from your toolbar to your backpack icon, and you drop it on the way, then attempt to place it back on your toolbar, you may crash.



■ Some of *Ultima IX*'s critters are a bit harder to kill than others; this dragon discourages the Avatar from taking a certain path early in the game.



A beholder tries to stop the journey to Britannia, but we have a feeling he won't be able to avoid the Avatar's sharp blade.

information from NPCs, game options, and a history of Britannia (the world's history from the first eight games). Alchemy sets provide a means to mix new potions from reagents, and books scattered all around provide recipes and clues about what's going on in the world. Just about everything in the game can be picked up, moved, carried, or otherwise manipulated. Gameplay is quite simply a roleplaying gamer's dream come true.

Playing *Ultima IX* is one of the most immersive experiences you'll ever have on your PC. As The Avatar, you'll journey all over Britannia, and that's a lot of space to travel. And this is a *real* world; as you explore the countryside, birds pass by overhead, wolves howl in the distance, and weather effects light up the environment with lightning and sprinkling rain. A day/night cycle also affects visibility and the need for appropriate lighting. Sound effects bounce off cavern walls, birds chirp in the trees, and even the subtle music shifts depending on the situation — mellow for gentle exploration, hurried and anxious during combat, and even a royal fanfare tune for wandering in Lord British's castle. With a sound card that supports Environmental Audio (EAX), even more nuances such as positional audio and echoes add to the sensation of actually venturing through Britannia.

Area transitions are handled well. When the Avatar comes to an entrance to a dungeon, it's a simple matter to wander inside. Rather than using the traditional (and immersion-jarring) loading screen, the transition from outdoors to indoors is as seamless as running down a corridor with only a minor pause to load the new textures.

And boy, are those textures varied and beautiful. Each area of the world appears to be hand-crafted. You never know what you're going to find when you



Each of the caverns, caves, and dungeons contains its own lighting and textures for truly unique areas.

turn the next corner, and that makes the game a joy to explore. Dungeons look completely different from each other, and characters are unique — you won't see the same model running around in different towns. Even the facial expressions of the NPCs change with the conversation.

While combat is real-time, it's hardly necessary to click frantically to win a battle. Much of the fighting is strategic, and knowing the proper weapon for a particular area lessens the need to worry about fighting and provides more time to contemplate the game's puzzles — most of them require finding certain items, but a few rely on piecing together tidbits of past information.

While some jumping puzzles present a more physical challenge, the interface lets players simply place the cursor in the spot they want the Avatar to land — there's no danger of becoming frustrated by a tricky jump. The lack of purely physical challenges like combat and jumping lends the game even more immersive qualities, since it's far more important to explore every nook

and cranny than worry about pulling out your warhammer in time to take down the goblin heading your way.

When you get right down to it, *Ultima IX* may be technically flawed, but its brilliance as a game ultimately outshines and overshadows any of these fail-

When you get right down to it, *Ultima IX* may be technically flawed, but its brilliance as a game ultimately outshines and overshadows any of these failings.

ings. Origin is currently working on a patch to improve compatibility between the game and the TNT Detonator drivers, and future patches promise to improve Direct3D performance. But it still seems very perplexing that Richard Garriott would throw body and soul into this game, one which he proudly proclaims represents the end of an era spanning three decades, only to stumble at the final

hurdle by allowing the product to ship with so many bugs. Why not finish the damn thing *properly* before releasing it to an eager and expectant fanbase?

So here it is: if you have a fast system backed up by a good Voodoo card, you'll find *Ultima IX* to be fast, beautiful, and a joy to experience. Everyone else should definitely hang around for those inevitable patches to correct the Direct3D issues before diving in. It'll be worth the wait.

—Michael Wolf



These two pictures show the varying degrees of draw distance in the game. The one on the left slows down the system the most (but looks the best); the one on the right has faster game performance.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Gorgeous; epic storyline; great spell effects; lots of NPC interaction.

80%

LOWS: Runs horribly on anything but a Voodoo card; bug-infested; monster AI could be better.

BOTTOM LINE: It would've been best RPG ever — if not for the bugs and video problems.



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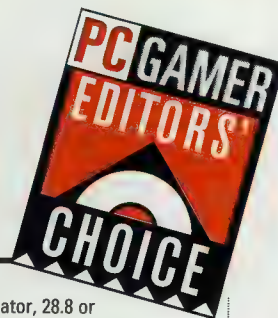
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Unreal Tournament



CATEGORY: Action **DEVELOPER:** Epic Games **PUBLISHER:** GT Interactive, (800) 810-GTIS, www.gtgames.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 200, 32MB RAM, 120MB hard-drive space, 8X CD-ROM drive **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 605MB hard-drive space, 3D accelerator, 28.8 or better modem **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play: HEAT.net, Maximum players: 32

Sick of the same old first-person shooter? Then welcome to the future of the genre!

Is anyone else disappointed by the new millennium? Aren't we supposed to be in the middle of the Golden Future right now? Where are our hovertoilets? Where are all the cool new space-products we were promised ("Honey, could you get me a Space-Twinkie out of the Space-cupboard?"), and darnit, where's the Jive-Talkin' Robot Butlers? Really, is a Robot Butler too much to ask for?

I'd have to say that in the absence of evil scheming supercomputers like HAL 9000, the most compelling artificially intelligent foes we have available today are the computer AI bots in *Unreal Tournament*. Sure, they won't fetch you a *Wall Street Journal* and smoking jacket while dishing out seventies slang, but these bots are a key factor in the evolution of a good game into a great one. In *Unreal*, the bots were an

afterthought that helped you practice deathmatch (even though they weren't much of a challenge), but in *Unreal Tournament* they're the stars of the show.

Battles against bots have taken the place of the threadbare single-player storylines you're used to seeing in first-person shooters. In fact, the single-player action in *UT* has more in common with *Street Fighter II* than it does with *Half-Life*. You don't progress through a linear storyline; instead you fight your way through a series of firefights with increasingly ferocious bots. In a single-player tournament you'll have to defeat bots in Deathmatch, Domination, Capture the Flag, and an innovative Assault mode.

Unreal Tournament deathmatch is very similar to *Unreal* deathmatch. The weapons are almost exactly like the originals. In fact, the only real difference is the addition of a new energy



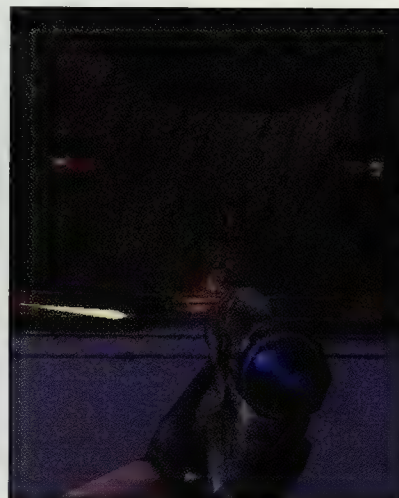
■ Sniper kills are as satisfying as ever, and even though they're crafty, bots still don't know how to escape from a good long-range sniper.

weapon and a few tweaks to the old weapons. Like the original, the weapons are all very powerful and result in faster kills than you'll find in any *Quake* game.

The deathmatch level design takes full advantage of the *Unreal* engine's powerful editing tools. Thanks to this wealth of geometry, you'll fight battles in futuristic Space-ships, atmospheric Space-Galleons and creepy Space-castles. Each level is extremely detailed, which makes the game look great, though occasionally the complex architecture gets in the way of gameplay. For instance, in the deathmatch level called "The Peak," you'll occasionally run around the outside of a building on narrow passageways. If you drop off these walkways and die just by accident, you



■ Your teammate bots stay out of the way for the most part, but if they do step in the line of fire, go ahead and frag them. They don't care — although they do talk trash with you.



■ Find out how Private Ryan's three older brothers bought the farm in this Assault level.



■ Watch your back — the bots are smart enough to turn your favorite camping spot into a burial plot.

won't care very much that the architecture looks cool.

This is an overall problem with *Unreal Tournament*. It seems as though many of the levels were designed with aesthetics taking priority over gameplay. If you compare the basic level design to id's *Quake III Arena*, you'll notice how often *UT* sacrifices substance for style. You'll appreciate a beautiful level the first few times you play, but you'll appreciate quality gameplay design every single time you play.

In the excellent Domination mode, you and a squad of friendly bot-buddies fight to gain control of three strategic areas. Domination allows you to really appreciate the bot AI. Even if you don't tell them exactly what to do (you can command them very easily if you so desire), they still play intelligently. This mode is the most frantic of all because you simply can't win it on your own, and you have to learn to trust. (Those of you who learned how to trust during one of those "very special episodes" of *Saved By the Bell* are ahead of the curve.) Coordination between you and your team's bots seems a little strange until you realize that the bots are conforming beautifully to "human" responses in the firefight. It's amazing.



■ Some maps, such as this floating spaceship, are as fun to explore as they are to fight in.



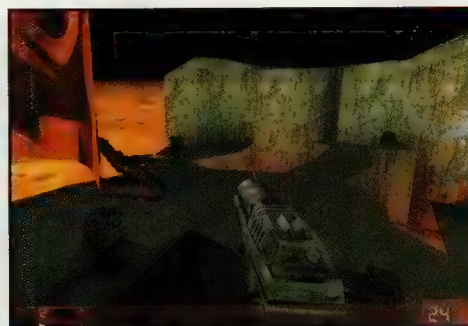
■ Occasionally, the level architecture will conflict with gameplay. Just try the deathmatch level called Galleon to see what we mean.

Capture the Flag is maybe the weakest gameplay mode available, if only because it adds nothing to this very familiar style of play. For what it is, though — a standard Capture the Flag variant — it's still great fun.

Assault is by far the most innovative and enjoyable mode in *Unreal Tournament*. The game gives you several objectives and you have to solve them before the clock runs out. If you beat the clock, the other team must accomplish the same goals faster than you. The quality of these levels is often hit or miss. Levels like the high-speed train, the Normandy assault, and a boat attack are great fun, while a few of the others are a bit too complicated to provide the same thrill. They're more examples of too much visual flair and not enough solid gameplay justification in the level design.

You're most likely asking two questions right now. The first is "When will I be able to get me some of them Space-Twinkies?" and the second is "Is the game fun even when you're just playing against bots?" The answer to the first is that you'll just have to be patient, and the answer to the second is a resounding yes. The bots play hard, talk smack when necessary, and pull your sorry Space-butt out of the Space-fire when you need them the most.

Coordination between you and your team's bots seems a little strange until you realize that the bots are conforming beautifully to "human" responses in the firefight. It's amazing.



■ Some of the CTF matches are absolutely massive. You better learn to use your teleporter here.

The bots also give the *UT* single-player game a longer life than any previous single-player mode in a first-person shooter. Long after you've finished the final chapter in *Half-Life*, you'll still be having fun playing against these bots. By changing any number of their properties, you can make a bot-match play like an entirely new game. We've played camping matches, blood-thirst brawls, and even set up a few scaredy-cat bot hunts.

But no matter how good the bots are, they still can't beat real, live competition. And thankfully, the Internet play in *Unreal Tournament* is dramatically better than that of its predecessor. No matter how well you play against bots, you'll find it an entirely more enjoyable experience to take your skills up against humans online. While the online gameplay is not quite as fast as that in some of the current competition, it's fast enough that it won't drag down your deathmatch experience.

Thanks to its excellent single-player mode, much improved network code, and overall gameplay, we barely even have to mention *UT*'s gorgeous graphics, rumbling sound, simple interface, and incredible editing tools. Even though it doesn't make us feel as futuristic as we'd feel on a hovertoilet, this game managed to exceed our expectations. Maybe the new millennium isn't going to be all so bad after all.

—Dan Egger

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: The best first-person shooter AI ever; enviable network code; exceptional design.

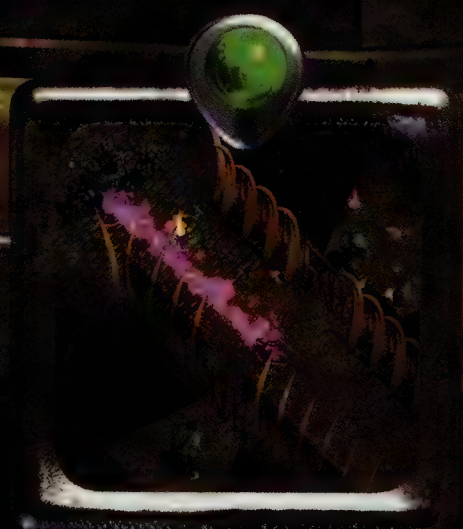
90%

LOWS: Some of the levels are designed more for look than gameplay.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the most enjoyable single-player and multiplayer action games ever.

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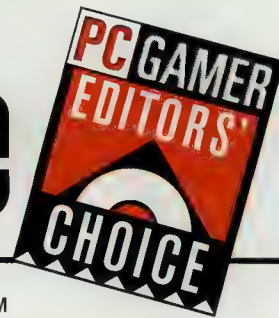
I'LL SICK MY OGRE AND
MOBILE TRAP ON HIM.



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"This is all the action you can handle."

The Wheel of Time



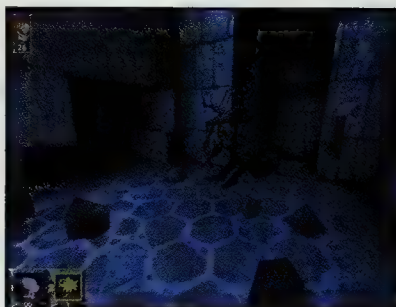
CATEGORY: Action **DEVELOPER:** Legend Ent. **PUBLISHER:** GT Interactive, (800) 610-GTIS, www.gtgames.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 500MB hard-drive space, D3D-compatible 3D accelerator **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 233, 64MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 16

Finally! A good game that not only shows off the Unreal engine, but also delivers compelling gameplay.

The talented developers at Legend Entertainment have mined the massive tomes of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series and forged their strongest elements into a game rich in story, character, action, magic, and atmosphere. I don't remember anything quite this interesting in the turgid pages of Jordan's *Eye of the World*, so I think much of the credit must go to the cinematic eye and design skill of designer Glen Dahlgren and his team, as well as to the wizards who gave us the *Unreal* engine that drives this marvelous dark fantasy.

If *Wheel of Time* does nothing else, it proves that a good third party developer can take *Unreal* to amazing heights — something that turds like *Klingon Honor Guard* made us doubt. Everything *Unreal* can do is on display here: architecture on a grand scale, vivid positional sound, fantastic colors and reflective surfaces, and more. *Wheel of Time* works because the right technology was pushed to its limit by an imaginative, talented developer.

The shadow of *Hexen* does rest heavily on *Wheel of Time*. Both mix some conventions of the FRPG (like complex magic and narrative) with the com-



In one example of the sometimes hard-coded AI scripting, this Minion kills a Trolloc and then runs away, even if you pursue, fire on him, or try to block him.

bat and pacing of the first-person shooter in a fantasy setting. While the *Hexen/Heretic* games suffer from too poor a sense of place and narrative pacing (as exemplified by those vexing "a door opens somewhere" messages), *Wheel of Time* never falls into that trap. Levels unfold fluidly and logically, punctuated by effective narrative films and driven by a clear sense of purpose. Coupled with a novel magic system and some fresh monsters, these elements make it a rich and rewarding experience.

The narrative is fairly complex, and since it provides *Wheel of Time* with a lot of its surprises and appeal, there's no real reason to detail it here. The premise is one of those patently illogical fantasy chestnuts — long ago the Dark One was trapped in a magical prison, and the seals that locked that prison were lost to mankind. [When will fantasy characters learn to A) just kill the evil guy, or B) find some better way to lock him up than a few easily lost/stolen objects, or C) remember to hold onto these things, but

I digress.] In the time of the story, various forces are all trying to get hold of these seals. Your character is a mild librarian named Elayna Sedai, who keeps the records of the White Tower. Her sisterhood, the Aes Sedai, protects two of the seals. This sisterhood is split into seven factions, with Elayna belonging to the Brown Aja, a sect of bookworms. Of course, one of the sects is in league with evil forces and wants the seals, etc. and so forth.

While the premise is fantasy boilerplate, the execution is quite strong, thanks to a number of plot twists, interesting characterizations, and a constant sense of danger and motion. Elayna is not a particu-

Spinning THE Wheel

When a series of fantasy novels clicks with readers it can go on for ages, with the author engaging in grotesque acts of prolixity over dozens of novels. Tolkien got out of the game after four books and some odd bits, but Katherine Kurtz, David Eddings, John Norman, and the latest flavor of the month, Robert Jordan (real name: James Oliver Rigney, Jr.), turn out epics that span thousands and thousands of pages. Of course, all the effort that goes into creating an elaborate cosmology to deal with the pressing issue of little people with hairy feet can produce some pretty interesting settings, which are arguably better suited to a game than 6,000 pages of fiction.

The Wheel of Time got its start in *The Eye of the World*, and seven other brick-thick novels have followed. Back in the 1980s Jordan was busy desecrating the work of a writer with actual talent — Robert E. Howard — by turning out a series of badly written novels about Howard's Conan the Barbarian. *Eye of the World* clicked in large part due to a massive marketing push by publisher Tor Books, where Jordan's wife was an editor. Bloated prose is common: "It is a year of strangers; of a lady; and a gleeman with his tales of heroes; and a peddler with news of the present — of war with Ghealdan, far away, and of the rising of a false Dragon — the savior whose coming, foretold and dreaded, will bring a new Breaking to the World." Etc. blah blah.

Good fantasy writers rarely go on so. Mervyn Peake and ER Eddison turned out tight, brilliant trilogies. All the Conan stories actually written by Howard can fit in three slim paperbacks. Yet the strained Xanth novels of Piers Anthony number somewhere in the twenties, and the life and loves of Rand and the rest go on long after their meager interest was tapped.

Jordan fans may vent their outrage by writing to: editor@pcgamer.com, skipping T. Liam McDonald completely.

larly powerful magician, but she is able to wield the ter'angreal: magical artifacts that perform awesome functions. As Elayna, you will collect various ter'angreal throughout the levels, with their placement evenly paced so that you'll never run short with judicious use. It's a very effective and supple magic system. The "spells" come in ten groups, which allows them to be easily bound to the 1-0 keys on the keyboard. Within these ten



The new monsters are a pretty decent-looking lot, though it's not likely you'll want to get too up close and personal.



■ These Trolloc Clan Leaders have a rather nasty axe-throwing attack, but these projectiles can be effectively dodged if you're nimble enough.

groups there are four slots for different ter'angreal, for a total of forty different spells divided among five elements (air, water, fire, earth, spirit).

This makes for one of the most elaborate magic systems yet seen in any action-heavy game. Spells are mostly for attack or defense, with a few that serve special functions like revealing traps, finding seals, and moving through space. There are attacks for different types of creatures, defenses for certain circumstances, counter-magic, and shields for each of the elements. Some of the ter'angreal are placed a bit clumsily, telegraphing a puzzle solution. When a "swap places" shows up around the corner from a sealed door with a guard on the other side, it's pretty easy to figure out how to proceed.

The inventiveness of the spells is matched by some truly different monsters. Particularly noteworthy are the nasty Minions, who can barely be described but are fast and dangerous at close range, and the Mashadar Tendrils, which are best described as sentient smoke.

More impressive than either story or combat, however, are the incredible locations. Levels are logical and well-paced,

The Wheel of Time works because the right technology was pushed to its limit by an imaginative, talented developer.

with a welcome diversity. There are sparsely populated levels where the danger, hidden in shadows, is rare but deadly. One level has no enemies at all: just a constant barrage of traps and a limited supply of trap detectors. In the middle of the game,

you'll need to hop through a series of gates suspended in blackness. Sometimes you need to kill everything that moves; other times, such as in the White

Tower, there are allies who will help you fight. A few levels are quite maze-like, but rarely frustrating, and, of course, there are a few pure combat levels. The vistas are amazing, and the architecture will blow you away. One

level, the City, is simply the creepiest location I've ever experienced in a game. The dim gray ruins, the constant drip of rain, and periods of calm punctuated by sudden explosions of violence make for some truly tense and frightening moments.

While solo gameplay is satisfying, multiplayer is in another realm altogether. There is a conventional death-match mode, but far more interesting is the Citadel game. Citadel is a riff on Capture the Flag in which you need to protect your seals while you steal your opponents'. To execute this, however, you can "edit" your environment by placing troops, traps, and alarms around your home base. Walls, pits, portcullises, tilting stairs, and spears can be placed anywhere in your citadel, and a variety of troops can be marshaled and placed as defenders. The placement mechanic is a bit touchy, however. I found it hard to place walls exactly where I wanted them. But overall it works well and makes for a terrific and addictive variation on classic CTF.

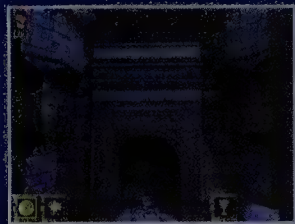
Wheel of Time solo is an uncommon, involving action/adventure. Shooter fans might find some of the puzzle levels too slow for them, but multiplayer more than makes up for this with scorching strategy/action variants. If you want to see just what heights the Unreal engine can achieve, don't miss it.

—T. Liam McDonald

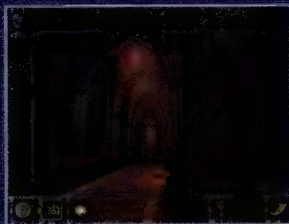
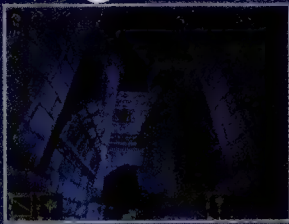


■ This giant-skinned pig from hell is conjured as you watch, and throws deadly spells that home in and track you around corners. The best way to kill him is with quick sniping attacks.

THE Architecture OF Fear



Here are just a few examples of the amazing architecture in *Wheel of Time*. The locations range from the gray and very creepy city to the warm opulence of the White Tower, with so much to delight the eye that it's easy to get killed while you enjoy the scenery.



PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Staggering atmosphere; satisfying magic combat system; terrific multiplayer.

90%

LOWS: Some of the event and monster AI script is too rigidly coded.

BOTTOM LINE: A rare game that mixes action with a good story, amazing scenery, and more.

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Asheron's Call

CATEGORY: Online Roleplaying **DEVELOPER:** Turbine Entertainment **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft Games, (425) 882-8080, www.microsoft.com/games **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 270MB hard-drive space, Super VGA video card, 28.8kbps Modem with Internet connection, Internet Explorer 3.02 or Netscape Navigator 4.0
WE RECOMMEND: Pentium II, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D accelerator card

While difficult to get into, players who stick with it will find plenty to like in Microsoft's new online RPG.

Okay, so here's the story: Apparently some sorcerer named Asheron slipped up and opened a portal to a world where a race of nasties called the Olthoi stormed through to Dereth and conquered the place (can you say, "oops"?). Asheron spirited the original inhabitants of Dereth, the Empyrean, away to safety, and new portals opened between Dereth and the human home world of Ispaar. Adventurous humans on Ispaar feel the pull of the portals on their homeworld, step through it, and suddenly find themselves on Dereth. And that's where *Asheron's Call*'s players come in.

Your AC experience kicks off by creating a character through an incredibly detailed process that lets you adjust everything from the shape of the eyes to the color of the boots. This character is a human chosen from one of three different races (Aluvian, Gharu'ndim, or Sho — loosely translated as Middle Ages Brit, Arabian, and Japanese, respectively). You can then choose from seven professions — Archer, Blademaster, Enchanter, Life Mage, Sorcerer, Vagabond, and Warrior, although players can also become a generic "Adventurer," which means

they've manipulated their stats so they don't fit into one of the pre-made templates. There's a huge variety of skills, and as you gain experience, you can "spend" that experience to raise the skill of their choice.

Once the business of creating a character is finished, you'll find yourself standing in an incredibly beautiful 3D world. The game, played from a third-person view (with a first-person option) is poetry in motion. No zones exist in the outside world. If a player wants to run from one end of the world to the other, it's possible — albeit time-consuming — to do so without a single zone load. Granted, there will be a few points where the game will pause for a second to draw in the oncoming terrain, but the words "Please Wait — Now Loading" simply don't exist in this game. Even standing on the top of a hill watching the sun set is beautiful, simply because everything you see actually exists within the current game-world, and you can run down to that sparkling lake and see what sort of flora grows nearby.

The closest approximation to waiting for a zone load happens when players run into a portal. Portals exist throughout Dereth, and might lead to a city on the other side of the world (making huge treks to other locations just to hook up with buddies unnecessary) or they might lead to a dank underground dungeon inhabited by the less whole-some members of Dereth's fauna.

Combat works well — you simply target the nearest creature, make sure you're in "fighting mode," and hit a key to begin the process. While the combat system isn't quite as easy as hitting a single key as soon as a creature is sighted, once you get used to it, it's not so bad. Magic works unlike any other system in an online game, since the more you use a spell the less powerful it gets. This may make sorcerers try harder to find more spells, but it also makes it frustrating when you can't quite get the hang of how to figure out how to create a spell without things blowing up in your face.

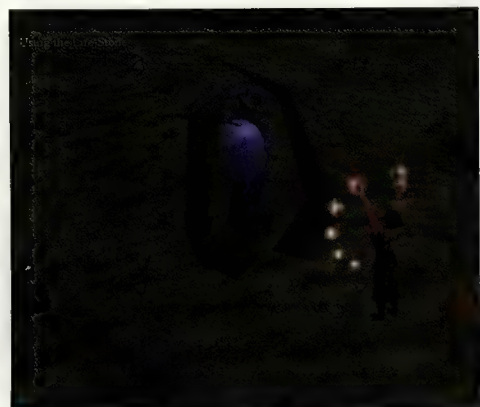


Hand-to-hand combat requires some nasty weapons to really inflict damage.

Luckily, the game contains a strong incentive to help out your fellow man — the Allegiance system lets players swear fealty to others, with benefits of experience going to the one who gains the vassal. In return, the (usually) higher-level character will deliver money and goods to the vassal, along with a healthy dose of advice and tips. With the Allegiance system in place, AC contains a lot of roleplaying. You'll find far fewer folks wandering around asking about hard drive malfunctions and more folks staying in character.

The worlds are so huge, and the population spread so thin, that many players will find themselves feeling a bit lonely. Forming parties is easy, but it's often difficult to find players to join your cause. This results in a lot of single-player gaming, and many of the dungeons contain only one or two other people. The result is an unfulfilling experience at first with the game, which may turn players off. If they stick with it, though, they'll be rewarded with a huge, epic online experience.

—Michael Wolf



Lifestones scattered throughout Dereth let players "attune" their life force to the stone — they return to the last stone they used when they die.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

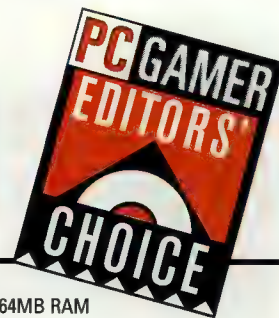
HIGHS: Beautiful graphics engine; no load zones, huge world makes the game feel epic.

80%

LOWS: Daunting learning curve; lack of direction gives it somewhat of a lonely feel.

BOTTOM LINE: A great roleplaying environment, but takes a lot of patience.

Age of Wonders



CATEGORY: Strategy **DEVELOPER:** Epic MegaGames and Triumph Studios **PUBLISHER:** Gathering of Developers, (877) GOD GAME, www.godgames.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 350MB hard-drive space, 4X CD-ROM drive **WE RECOMMEND:** PII 200, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** TCP/IP or IPX for network, Free play on HeatNet, PBEM

In a season distinguished by some great strategy titles, *Age of Wonders* stands tall. Very tall.

Can it be possible that turn-based gaming is experiencing a renaissance? Several very good (and commercially successful) recent games have restored some luster to this classic format. *Age of Wonders* trumps them all. If you want a dramatic demonstration of what can be done within the spacious, exfoliating, open-ended universe of turn-based gaming, AOW is it.

The world, my friends, is *depth*. This game is so layered with options, spheres of activity, tantalizing possibilities, and epic sweep that it sucks you in just like a great fantasy novel. Mid-way through one campaign, I presided over a vast, climactic battle that played out — so help me God — almost exactly like the fabled “Battle of Helm’s Deep” in *Lord of the Rings*. I was emotionally drained when it was over.

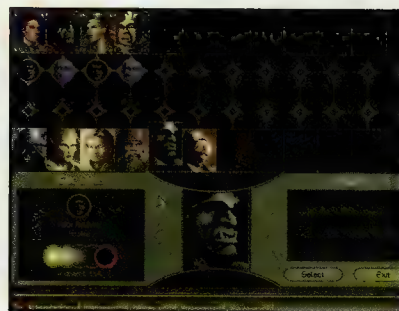
Do I really need to waste space telling you the plot? Suffice it to say that it hinges on a very imaginative exul-

sion-from-Eden trope, and that AOW deploys the usual cast of races (dwarves, elves, orcs, humans, etc.) along with some interesting new ones: Frostlings, Lizardmen, and Azracs (a desert-dwelling folk who use giant scorpions as infantry).

The game really goes all-out, though, in its huge and colorful array of units. Quite often, your first encounter with a new unit will add a delicious piquancy to the adventure. My favorites? The Ladies of Pain (leather-clad amazons who scourge their foes with whips), the Nymphs (during melee combat they run up to an enemy soldier and kiss him, paralyzing him with lust so that he can’t defend himself), and the Bomber bugs (organic kamikaze things that look like huge bloated ticks and explode like napalm). And be especially wary of the Dire Penguins!

AOW also offers a fresh take on magic. There are eight “spheres” of power; when creating a Leader, you may dedicate him to a single sphere (so he can gain the most powerful spells) or spread your points to multiple spheres, so he can attain a fair-to-middling proficiency with a wide variety of spells. When choosing spheres, don’t mess with Mother Nature: Fire spells don’t work well with Water spells, nor Earth with Air.

Combat comes in three flavors: hands-on tactical management, tactical displays controlled by the PC (very useful until you grow familiar with the units’



Consult the Relations screen regularly to find out who’s neutral, hostile, or friendly.

capabilities), or fast, abstract PC resolution (useful for bypassing battles so obviously one-sided they’re not worth watching). Real tactics are integrated, using terrain, ranged weapons, cavalry, spell-casting, and a bunch of weird but colorful side actions that cannot easily be described. All battles are accompanied by gratifying screams, crunching bones, and spurting gore.

Diplomacy plays a very important role in multiplayer games (and a surprisingly vital one in most solo games). There are no major innovations here, but the system is tight, effective, and graphically appealing.

I didn’t care for the graphics as a whole until I’d lived with them for a while (they seemed a bit pedestrian after the crackling sharpness of *Disciples*), but I soon came to love them. The style is straight out of classic fairy tale books, and the amount of detail is wondrous.

Age of Wonders is not a perfect game. The manual omits descriptions of some interface elements, causing you to stumble until you figure things out. As I write this review, many of these have already been patched. In any case, they are niggling. And on my system at least, game stability was rock-solid. But in all the ways that count, *Age of Wonders* is one of the richest, most gripping fantasy/strategy games of our time. I simply can’t stop playing.

—William Trotter



Tactical combat is gratifyingly varied and exciting. The interesting array of units keeps things fresh.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Incredible depth and atmosphere combined with a surprisingly strong narrative.

91%

LOWS: Well, the box art is drab and cheesy...

BOTTOM LINE: With its great combat system and colorful array of units, turn-based gaming doesn’t get much better than this.

Creation is the easy part...



David
Lazy
Shy

Shannon
Active
Playful

Stan
Serious
Neat

Justin
Outgoing
Nice

Doris
Grouchy
Sloppy

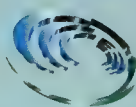
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SWAT 3: Close Quarters

CATEGORY: Tactical Action **DEVELOPER:** Sierra Studios **PUBLISHER:** Sierra, (800) 757-7707, www.sierra.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard-drive space, 4X CD-ROM, 4MB video card capable of high-color display, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 333MHz or higher, 64MB RAM, Direct3D-compatible video card with 8MB memory or greater **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

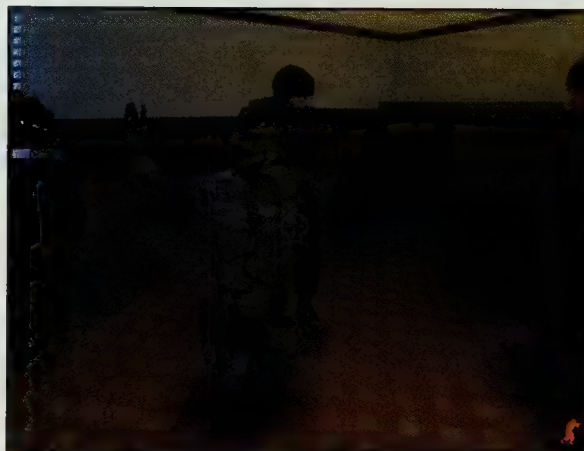
The third time is really the charm as the SWAT series finally finds its genre.

It's hard to imagine a more exciting premise for a realistic squad-level combat simulation than taking control of a SWAT team. Finding the best way to simulate SWAT operations, though, has proved frustrating for Sierra — and at least part of the problem was that the company often put the cart before the horse by cramming its SWAT games into genres that were hot at the time rather than fitting the design to the subject matter. *Police Quest: SWAT* and *SWAT 2* were flawed attempts at FMV adventure and real-time strategy, respectively. For Sierra, the potential of its SWAT series must have felt like the million-dollar check nobody could cash.

But doggedly, they stuck with the concept — and I'm sure glad they did. Thanks to some utterly convincing 3D-modeled graphics, *SWAT 3: Close Quarters Combat* will grab you by your body armor and drag you into the action from your very first assignment — and once there, you'll find yourself hooked by the game's superior artificial

intelligence routines, seamless interface, and the sweaty tension of each of the 16 missions. The first two SWAT titles felt like games; by narrowing its scope to focus intensely on in-the-field tactics, Sierra Studios has made *SWAT 3: CQB* feel like the real thing.

You play as an officer of D Platoon in LAPD SWAT, and though the action is set five years in the future, the events that frame your missions are frighteningly plausible even today. An international anti-nuke summit featuring representatives from every nation in the world is about to take place, and it's SWAT's task to ensure the safety of all of them. That won't be easy, because despite the name, this is no *City of Angels*: besides being faced with the threat of terrorists drooling at the thought of so many potential hostages being crammed into one location, you've also got to deal with the indigenous crazies that call L.A. home. In a move more developers should follow, Sierra Studios has opened up every mission of the game

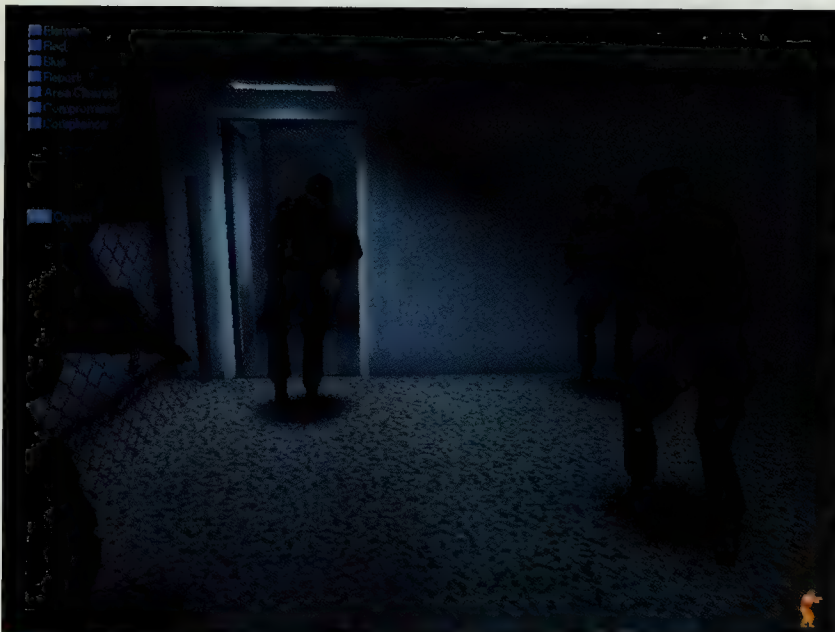


Don't forget to remove weapons — both holstered and those dropped on the floor — after you subdue a suspect.

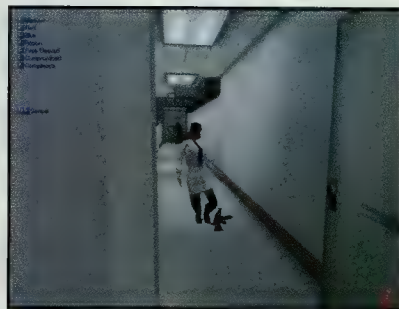
for instant access — but it's much more rewarding to play those same missions in Career mode because you'll learn more and more about the threats your squad will face and the events leading up to each crisis.

There are a ton of environments to charge into, all modeled after actual photos and each looking very sharp. They include private residences, a nightclub, underground sewers, and even the Los Angeles International Airport control tower.

SWAT 3 features four basic mission types: capturing barricaded suspects, serving high-risk warrants, hostage rescue, and deploying rapidly to the scenes of emergencies with little knowledge of what you'll be facing. The vast majority of situations fall into the last two categories, but each mission is still exciting and unique because of the tactical challenges posed by the various locations and the characters you encounter during each operation. All sorts of audio tidbits add to the ambi-

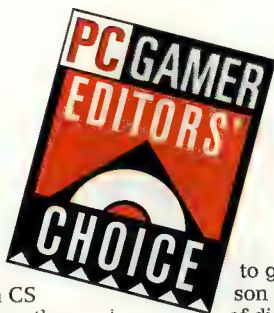


Watching an element stack up to enter a passageway is eerily convincing, thanks in no small part to the game's incredibly detailed graphics.



SWAT teams can't discriminate — if a female suspect won't put down her weapon, then it's time to put her down.

Battle



ence — hostages and captors choke and cough when hit with CS gas, terrorists laugh maniacally as they squeeze off automatic-weapons fire, rescued victims take umbrage at being cuffed, and downed suspects groan in pain as they lie bleeding on the floor.

The interface is so slick and seamless that you'll be able to focus on command decisions even from the game's

first-person perspective. There's no mission-planning segment in *SWAT 3*: all orders are issued on the fly, enabling you to adjust a team's actions instantly to reflect changing circumstances. Simply point your reticule at a door, hallway, or person, and you can quickly issue the appropriate command via a menu tree that's always visible. You can even control teams on the other side of a room or building by using a Search command and listening to their audio feedback as they advance.

The only distractions you'll face in the line of duty, in fact, are what might be the most convincing character graphics and special visual effects ever

to grace a first-person game. Suspension of disbelief? It comes

pretty easily when you can see creases in your team's uniforms and a flash of fire erupt from their muzzles as they open fire. Character faces and clothing are equally realistic, and the end result is that you really do

care about saving the lives of as many people possible on each mission — even the lives of the guys that were spraying machine-gun fire at you from behind a wall.

Yes, I said from behind a wall, because thanks to some impressive artificial intelligence programming, you'll be faced with that sort of lifelike behavior in *SWAT 3*. Some suspects can be subdued simply by shouting at them to get down and drop their weapons; some use hostages as human shields as they pop off rounds at your team; still others will ignore your



Muzzle flashes and gunsmoke are just a couple of the special visual effects that'll have you convinced you're actually in the middle of a SWAT operation.

commands and raise their weapons to fire even though they have four high-powered assault rifles trained on them.

There's so much to love about *SWAT 3* that I'd instantly recommend it to any fan of squad-level tactical action — but that recommendation wouldn't be unqualified because there are some puzzling oversights here. The first is the manual: it's smug and poorly organized, leaving you in the dark about key aspects of play, particularly how your leadership performance rating is calculated (it also never mentions how to arrest a suspect — you need to use the "Evacuate" command). Then there's the lack of a multiplayer mode. To be fair, Sierra Studios made it clear in numerous previews that the multiplayer missions (and a level-editor) would ship *after* the game was released, but the fact remains that without a multiplayer mode there's little reason to come back to *SWAT 3* once you've completed all the missions.

But you can count on quite a few hours of absolutely engrossing gameplay before you finish *SWAT 3*, and by then your command decisions and tactical skills will have been so challenged that you can hang on until that add-on arrives. If you're a fan of "thinking-man's shooters," *SWAT 3* should be the next addition to your software collection.

—Stephen Poole

Our SWAT 3 Wish-List

While Sierra Studios won't confirm it at this time, there's a good possibility that the *SWAT 3* add-on featuring multiplayer support will also include a level editor so users can create their own scenarios. For those in need of inspiration for scenarios, perhaps a trip to the local video store can provide you with some ideas — there have been plenty of movies dealing with situations involving SWAT-style situations. Whether or not the level editor will be able to duplicate every single thing is doubtful, but with a little ingenuity you can probably work your way around it to capture the feel of the flick and still have some awesome missions:

The Taking of Pelham 123 (1974): Robert Shaw and pals seize a NYC subway train, demanding a million dollars ransom — and if the dough isn't delivered they promise to start shooting a passenger per minute! A subway car mission would be a claustrophobic delight.

Black Sunday (1977): Robert Shaw

again (that psychotic bastard), this time planning to kill everyone at the Super Bowl by flying over the L.A. Coliseum with a blimp loaded with explosives. You'd need some finesse to create flying objects and huge outdoor areas, but the payoff in the blimp's gondola could be brilliant.

Juggernaut (1974): Richard Harris is the head of a bomb squad who must locate seven bombs on board a luxury ocean liner. It's unlikely the *SWAT 3* level-editor could handle something the size of an ocean liner and still feature good graphics, so we'd knock it down to a few of the cooler areas of the ship (and pack 'em full of bad guys, of course).

Sudden Death (1995): I know, I know — it's a Jean Claude Van Damme movie. But the idea of saving a coliseum full of screaming fans at the Stanley Cup finals is too good to pass up, and the idea of cops and villains taking falls on the rink in the middle of a gun battle sounds pretty good, too.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Excellent graphics, effects and AI make this one of the most intensely realistic squad-level action games ever.

88%

LOWS: Poor manual; lack of multiplayer means there's not much replay value.

BOTTOM LINE: An out-and-out winner.

Sim Theme Park

CATEGORY: Strategy **DEVELOPER:** Bullfrog **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts, (650) 628-5999, www.ea.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, 400MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 16X CD-ROM drive, 8MB 3D graphics accelerator **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

While it's colorful and imaginative, extended play exposes this sequel's shallow content.

When I was growing up, the highlight of my summer vacations was usually a trip to one amusement park or another. We hit every one on the East Coast, and each left an indelible impression on me. So any time a game comes around that lets you design and control your own park, I'm all over it like a flea on a shaggy dog.

Sim Theme Park, from Bullfrog, is the latest game to take on this most worthy of subjects. Of course, Bullfrog has to be considered the father of this style of strategy game, having released the inventive original, *Theme Park*, in 1994. There was much to like in *Theme Park*, but ultimately, it just didn't have enough variety to hold my interest over the long haul. Amazingly, five years later, the complaint remains the same.

On the surface, you wouldn't think that would be the case. There are four very distinct themes to explore — Lost Kingdom, Halloween World, Wonder Land, and Space Zone — each having its own set of rides, attractions, and concessions. The 3D graphics are fairly simple, but quite attractive in a cartoonish way, and the sound effects make you feel like you're at a real amusement park.

What brings *Sim Theme Park* down to the realm of just a very good game, instead of the classic it could have been, is the repetitiveness of it all. Play through any one of the themes and you'll have experienced all of the gameplay that *Sim Theme Park* has to offer. Most of the rides that appear in each theme park are literally just variations based on the theme. The coasters and water rides may look different, but they are all constructed in exactly the same way and all have the same performance characteristics.

It's pretty disappointing, because there is such a strong base to build on. The design interface for the coasters is ingenious, allowing you to easily add track sections, loops, twists, and banks with a click and a pull of the mouse. Perhaps the biggest innovation is that you can enter a first-person view to walk around the park and ride the rides. It's great fun, but does tend to lose its



Riding your coasters is quite a bit of fun. The interface for designing these types of rides is easy to use and one of the better parts of the game.



The four themes all have an attractive look of their own, but many of the rides are just variations of those found in all of the others.

"wow" factor after a while.

There are two ways to play the game: Instant Action and Full Simulation. In the first mode you don't have to worry about things like finances, but you're also limited to the number of items you get to place in the park. In Full Sim mode, your tasks include researching rides and ride upgrades, setting the ticket price (for the whole park only — rides are free to paying customers) and concession prices, and managing a staff of janitors, mechanics, security people, researchers, and entertainers.

Your staff needs direction in order to function with anything resembling efficiency. This means that every time you add to your park, you *must* hire new staff and set their patrols to cover the new area. Don't even think about letting these palookas operate autonomously. In my

first game, I didn't set any patrol areas for my workers, and within minutes the park was filled with garbage, fouled bathrooms, and rampant criminal activity. Having to perform this ritual each time you expand the park makes the gameplay very formulaic and tedious.

Another problem is that the space you have to work with is so tight (you can buy more land, but it's pretty expensive) that there's really no room to add all of the niceties that could give your park some personality.

Inevitably it has to be compared to the very popular *RollerCoaster Tycoon* from MicroProse, a game that delivers a more in-depth take on the subject. *Sim Theme Park* is a decent choice for a park-building sim, especially for the younger set. But it will have strategy veterans, especially those that already have played and enjoyed *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, asking, "Is that all there is?"

—Rob Smolka

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Riding the rides; pretty graphics and immersive sound; building coasters is great fun.

73%

LOWS: Every game tends to play out the same way; confined area to build in; the help is dumb.

BOTTOM LINE: Recommended as an introductory game for the meatier *RollerCoaster Tycoon*.

Nations

CATEGORY: Flight sim **DEVELOPER:** Psygnosis **PUBLISHER:** Psygnosis, (800) GET-PSYG, www.psygnosis.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233 w/MMX, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 150MB hard-drive space, 4MB Direct3D accelerator card, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 16X CD-ROM drive, 800MB hard-drive space, 8MB AGP Direct3D accelerator card, Joystick, Throttle, Rudders **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 16

**The box says it's
"incredibly realistic,"
but don't you believe it
for a second.**

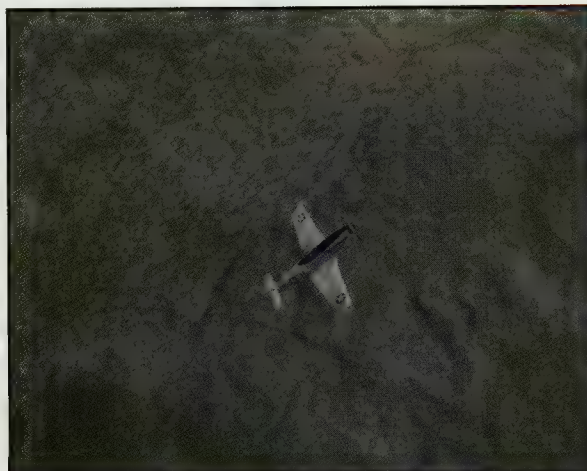
There was some faint hope for *Nations: WWII Fighter Command* when Psygnosis decided to hold it until last year's glut of World War Two sims had passed. Maybe, we thought in our naivete, they were spending the extra time making this the WWII sim to end all

WWII sims: testing, improving, refining. Maybe they were, as they promised, going to blow *European Air War* out of the sky. Actually, they have done what seemed impossible — they've created a World War Two sim more sloppy and half-assed than that colossal disappointment, *Luftwaffe Commander*.

Mein gott, is this a mess. Where does one begin? With the mushy mediocre graphics or the brain-damaged AI? With the flat-out terrible flight



Expect to experience constant and amusing AI flaws for both friendly and enemy craft, who like to fly into hills.



Plane and terrain graphics aren't any great shakes considering the mandatory accelerator requirements.

model or the weird *Myst*-like interface? About the only positive thing that can be said about it is that it doesn't crash. The program, that is. The planes crash plenty. Psygnosis was on auto-pilot with this one, creating sim specs so generic that they must have engaged the WWII-Sim-O-Matic to design it. The same tired planes (wow, another Mustang!), the same familiar mix of Axis and Allied European missions, the same limp canned campaign. If this was all done exceptionally well, its utter familiarity wouldn't be so devastating. But coming as it does almost a year after three superb examinations of the same exact material, it strikes one as the height of pointlessness, more so considering exactly how poorly it's all implemented.

The most galling element of *Nations* is the absurd claim to realism, which is so prominent on the box and in the ads that it approaches consumer fraud. "Incredibly realistic," we are informed. "Accurately modeled aircraft," "true flight physics," and other claims just make the gorge rise. Three flight models are offered: easy, realistic, and ultra-realistic. This last one will give seasoned simmers the biggest laugh (or scream, if they threw away their receipt). You would expect something called "ultra-realistic" to include minor features like stalls, spins, speed bleeding, and other effects. Instead, you get super-powered planes that never seem to spin or stall. You really need to deliberately try to spin these planes, and climbs feel like something out of *Freespace 2*. It's about as far from "ultra-realistic" as you can get.

Almost as fun is the AI. I did not have a single flight where a plane did not auger into the ground. Pilots have only a few programmed moves and put up almost no fight whatso-



There may be a more bland and lifeless cockpit somewhere on the sim market, but I have yet to see it.

ever. Of course, it's impossible to put up much of a fight when your AI routine orders you to "fly into ground" every three lines. At least this meant friendlies weren't shooting me too much, which is always a plus with a bad AI.

Multiplayer might indeed have some potential, but I'm damned if I can tell you. When you go to set up a game you have a choice of network or serial, which is nice since serial is becoming increasingly rare in multiplayer support. To set up a game you can either enter an ICP number or "search for active games." There doesn't seem to be any matching service whatsoever, and the reducto ad absurdum of the connection options simply leaves you flapping in the breeze. There are power-ups in the multiplayer mode, which is pretty much everything you need to know about this "ultra-realistic" sim.

Finally, *Nations* has all the visual pizzazz of a watercolor left in the rain. Terrain is lifeless and planes look muddy. Explosions are about the only visually acceptable thing in the whole game, but it hardly matters. This one doesn't even merit consideration as an arcade game when you factor in the pathetic AI. The grand parade of WWII combat started with the thunder of *EAW* has fizzled into the wet fart of *Nations*.

—T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: The manual has a nice layout and few typos.

LOWS: Appalling AI; unrealistic even on "ultra-realistic" settings; muddy visuals; strange interface.

BOTTOM LINE: The last and by far the least of the WWII flight sims.

10%

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Score: **9.5 out of 10**

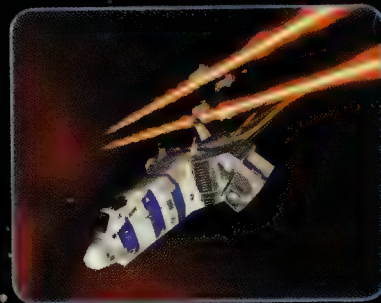
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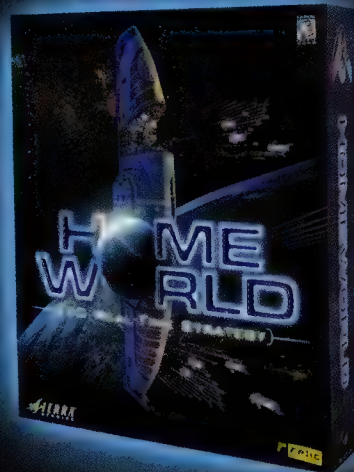
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Omikron: The Nomad Soul

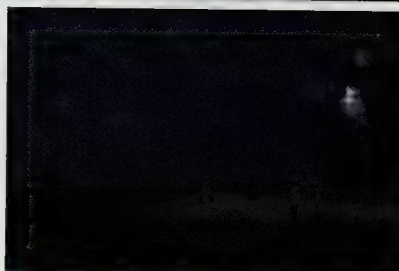
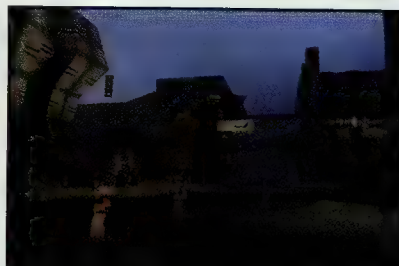
CATEGORY: Action/Adventure **DEVELOPER:** Quantic Dream **PUBLISHER:** Eidos, (415) 538-0999, www.eidosinteractive.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 350MB hard-drive space, 8x CD-ROM, 4MB SVGA video card, 100 percent DirectX 6.1 or higher compliant sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium III 450MHz, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB uncompressed disk space, 16-32MB 3D card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

This ambitious adventure game's achievements are overshadowed by its gameplay failures.

I am a stubborn bastard. As the technical editor here at *PC Gamer*, it's my job to be. I'll often spend hours trying to figure out why a game or piece of hardware isn't running properly. I'll uninstall, reinstall, and format all night long if I have to. So, considering it only took me an hour and a half to really begin playing *Omikron* the first time out, I wasn't overly upset. A less patient gamer, on the other hand, probably would have boxed the game back up and returned it for something else.

I sensed trouble right from the beginning. The first paragraph in the manual under "Playing the game" contains a statement that flatly states you aren't going to get a lot of important information from said manual because the developer wants you to "discover things as you go." Great, now we're all free to wander *Omikron* aimlessly trying to make heads or tails out of our surroundings. This is a regrettably fashionable attitude for developers to take.

I didn't fully realize how bad the manual really was until I actually started playing the game. *Omikron* is played in



■ The world of *Omikron* can look downright incredible if you're running it using a 1GHz processor and a liquid-cooled video card (top), but it also looks pretty good when running on an average system (below).

three separate modes: third-person adventure mode, first-person armed combat, and unarmed fighting mode. Unfortunately, none of these modes are explained adequately, and when you try to reconfigure the control keys for any of these modes via the game options menu, your changes take effect both in the game and in the option screens as well. That gets very confusing.

Then there's the fact that I played *Omikron* on a PIII 500MHz with 128MB of RAM and a GeForce 256-based graphics accelerator (pretty much the fastest 3D card on the planet), and the game still chugged unless I set the clipping distance extremely close (making the world of *Omikron* look perpetually fogged-in), bumped down the detail settings and/or turned shadows off. Thankfully, most of the slowdowns occur when walking through the game's huge outdoor environments. While indoors, framerates tend to be better.

After I got past all of the configuration nonsense, what I found was

that the gameplay was actually rather fun — even though both the first-person and side-on combat segments look and play rather poorly, and the game would have been considerably better without either of them. Thankfully the overwhelming majority of the game is played in a straightforward third-person adventure mode with involving exploration and puzzle-solving elements.

The game begins with you, a lowly gamer, in front of your PC, having your soul transferred over to that of a denizen in the parallel world of *Omikron*. You soon discover that your new body belongs to a cop and that his partner has recently been killed. Your task is to find out what happened to him, and in the process learn more about the troubles in this strange parallel universe (where every person looks the same, and where there are only ever two types of vehicles on the streets).

One of the game's cooler features is "virtual reincarnation." What this means is that you, the free-spirited soul that you are, can occasionally slip into other people's bodies to aid you in your quest — both when you want to and sometimes when you don't. The only frustrating aspect of this feature is that (surprise!) it's never mentioned in the manual — what it is or how it's accomplished. This would have been fine if the game had placed my soul in another body at some point before I knew that transferring bodies was an element of the game, but I came across two different characters that I could tell I was supposed to be able to possess based on my strange interactions with them, but couldn't actually do so until much later. Where's the "wow" factor in that?

By the way, don't let David Bowie's presence on the box factor in on the decision, either; he's here just as a gimmick.

When all is said and done, is *Omikron* worth the price of admission? Perhaps, but only if you're a very big fan of adventure gaming and are able to look past the misguided aimlessness of its gameplay to explore its vast universe and story.

—Greg Vederman



■ The first-person shooter elements in *Omikron* look poor, control sluggishly, and have no place being in this game.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Expansive story; adventure elements are entertaining.

68%

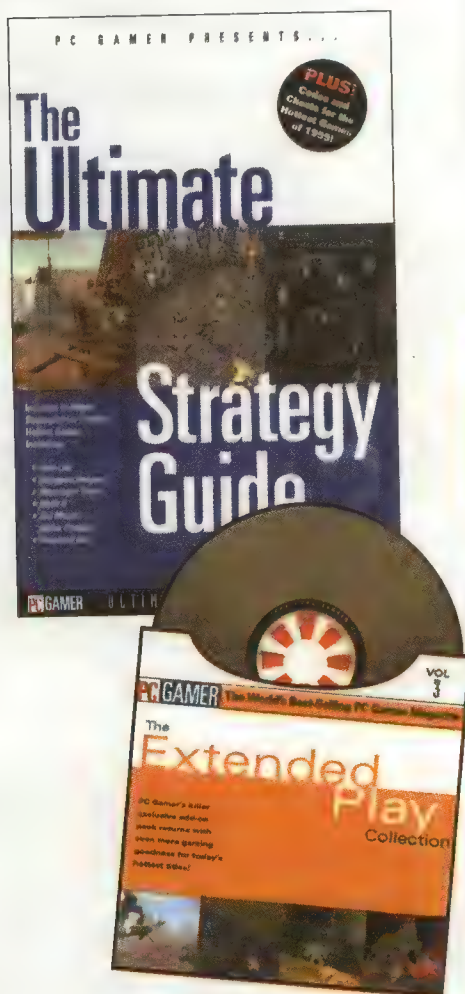
LOWES: Sloppy controls; high system requirements; bad manual.

BOTTOM LINE: *Omikron* is a fun adventure if you can accept its meandering design and pointless side modes (and get the game working).

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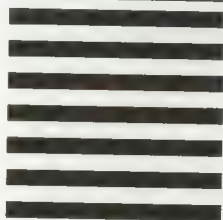
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Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure **DEVELOPER:** LucasArts Entertainment **PUBLISHER:** LucasArts Entertainment, (925) 275-1190, www.lucasarts.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 56MB hard-drive space, 4X CD-ROM drive, 4MB PCI or AGP Direct3D-compatible 3D accelerator, DirectX-compatible 16-bit sound card
WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 32X CD-ROM drive **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

The gameplay screams Tomb Raider, but the story's all Indy as LucasArts propels the original adventuring archaeologist into the world of 3D.

Here's a challenge for you: find a review of any of the *Tomb Raider* games that doesn't have the words "Indy" or "Indiana Jones" in it somewhere. You can't, of course, because the premise of *Tomb Raider* was so clearly inspired by the Indy movies that you might suspect the reason the game featured a female lead was to avoid some sort of lawsuit (there were two other big reasons for it to be a heroine, but the game's behind-the-back perspective meant you couldn't see 'em all the time). With *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine*, LucasArts has done a little borrowing of its own: you'd have to be in a coma not to think of Ms. Croft as you watch Indy run, jump, climb, swim, shoot, and swing his way through the game's 17 levels. But while this sure isn't the first game to take its cue from *Tomb Raider*, it's definitely one of the best.

One of the big reasons *Infernal Machine* stands out from the crowd of third-person action-adventures is the storyline by Hal Barwood, whose previous credits include the great graphic adventure *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*. Set in 1947, *Infernal Machine* replaces those nasty Nazis Indy thwarted so often in the past with Russian scientists, spurred on by the escalating Cold War to find the ultimate weapon — and just like the Nazis, the Commies are focusing their search on the myths of

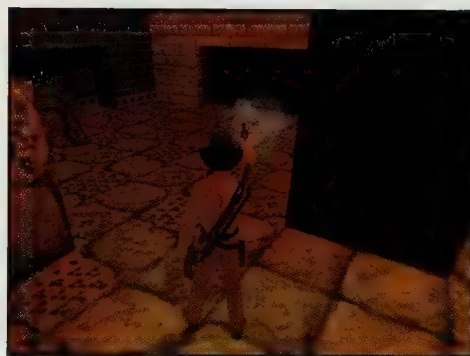
ancient history. This time it's the Tower of Babel, which head Russkie Dr. Gennadi Voloonikov theorizes was actually a machine capable of unleashing the power of Marduk, a Babylonian god who resides in another dimension called the "Aetherium" (and which some Biblical scholars identify as none other than Satan himself). As Indy, you've got to find the four missing parts needed to make the machine work — and eventually square off against Marduk himself.

Though some of the character graphics and animations are only middling to fair (Voloonikov looks particularly cartoonish), you'll probably spend so much time admiring the terrain and scenery graphics that you won't care in the least bit. Whether you're moving through expansive external environments or jumping and climbing inside awe-inspiring temples, the 3D visuals here are almost movie-like in their quality.

In a move designed to appeal to gamers more than to fans of the Indy flicks, LucasArts has supplemented our hero's pistol and whip (which Indy can use to haul himself up to normally unreachable locations) with an arsenal of more powerful weapons: You'll get to use a rifle, machine gun, hand grenades, and even a bazooka. Despite the beefed-up weaponry, however, combat isn't the *Infernal Machine*'s strong suit. Even with an auto-aiming feature, Indy's sluggish turning movements make it tough to kill soldiers and critters. Fortunately,

LucasArts didn't try to hang Indy's fedora on run-and-gun action. The heart and soul of *Infernal Machine* revolves around pulling off a variety of acrobatic maneuvers and solving some decidedly difficult puzzles, many of which involve pulling levers and pushing buttons to activate machinery.

About the only weak points of *Infernal Machine* have nothing to do with gameplay, but instead with mundane



Auto-aiming makes it fairly simple to kill the pesky poisonous critters nipping at Indy's heels — provided you can move him to a spot where he has time to get off a shot or two before they reach him.

tasks like configuring keyboard assignments and loading saved games: the keyboard configuration is a needlessly clunky affair that runs entirely separate from the game proper, and unless you opted for the full install (890MB — the only other option is a meager 56MB install), you can expect some pretty serious waits as data loads from the CD-ROM. There are also a couple of bugs, including a particularly nasty one that can keep you from leaving a level even after you've completed it. Hopefully LucasArts will release a patch to take care of these problems.

Longtime gamers who were hoping for a more traditional graphic adventure might be disappointed that LucasArts went the action-adventure route with *Infernal Machine*, but in a year that's seen plenty of high-quality action-adventures, *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine* stands up near the head of the class.

—Stephen Poole



Controlling the jeep is much easier than guiding a raft down a raging river, but there are still opportunities for disaster.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Killer terrain and object graphics; challenging puzzles; a strong plot.

LOWS: Uninspiring combat and decidedly derivative gameplay; achingly long load times.

BOTTOM LINE: Lara Croft gets paid back in her own coin for stealing Indy's thunder.

76%

12 O'Clock High

CATEGORY: Turn-based strategy **DEVELOPER:** Talonsoft **PUBLISHER:** Talonsoft, (410) 933-9191, www.talonsoft.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233, 64 MB RAM, 95MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 266, 8x CD-ROM drive **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Play-by-E-mail, Hotseat, Maximum players: 2

Like *Battle of Britain*, this game is easy to admire but rather harder to love without a passionate interest in the subject matter.

1 2 O'Clock High: Bombing the Reich essentially takes up where *Battle of Britain* left off: having survived the worst the Luftwaffe could throw at England, the Allies are gearing up to teach the Germans what "strategic bombing" really means.

The full campaign recreates the entire bombing offensive from August 17, 1943 until the bitter end (which may or may not take place in May 1945, depending on whether or not the Germans can get their jets into production in time for them to have any real impact). In terms of sheer dogged length, this must set some kind of record: approximately 700 turns at, say, 20 minutes each, gives you about 230 hours of play. No one can accuse Talonsoft of not giving you your money's worth.

That's great; it really is. But it's the gaming equivalent of reading every paragraph of the Sunday *New York Times* — everyone who buys the paper is glad to know it's all the news that's fit to print. But most of them are going to read only three or four sections in any detail.

Fortunately, you can play shorter, more specific campaigns, such as the six-week Oil Offensive (6/6/44-7/27/44), Operation Avalanche (8/17/43-10/15-43, a massive ground support effort flown in conjunction with the invasion of Italy), or Jet Age '44, a 500-turn epic based on the assumption that the Luftwaffe received ME-262s earlier and in greater numbers than was historically the case.



Tweaking the Visual Preferences can minimize jerky animation resulting from a host of planes moving all at once.

To win, the Allied player must score sufficient victory points in three categories: air superiority, industrial damage, and sheer terror inflicted on civilians. Logically, the Axis player wins by preventing the Allies from scoring those points. More detailed tasks for the Axis (which you can handle yourself or assign to your computerized staff) include: plotting interceptions and fighter sweeps, massing flak defenses, patrolling, and setting production priorities for everything from engines to air frames. Subordinate routines for the Allied player include targeting priorities, resource allocations, escort management, recon, and night intruder missions.

As with *Battle of Britain*, designers Gary Grigsby and Keith Brors have calmed a raging ocean of data and made it playable. To cite one example: no less than 17 electronic countermeasure systems (from crude airborne radars to sophisticated jammers) are modeled in the game, and each confers a historically accurate advantage to the side that possesses it. Another nice touch: the cumulative impact of strategic bombing is reflected in the performance of Axis ground troops.

Overall, the interface is pretty much the same as it was in *Battle of Britain* — not very intuitive perhaps, but logical and efficient. There are the same global phases for each side (Axis Movement, Allied Raid Planning, and Reaction phases). Again, you have wide latitude regarding the amount of (well, I almost wrote "micromanagement," but in this case "nano-management" might be more accurate) you want to handle. Few players will have the time or patience to set up 50 missions bit by bit, in a single turn! But the AI can organize three times that many without breaking a sweat.

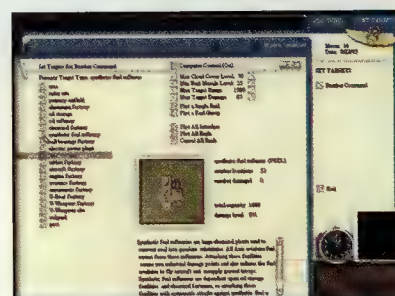
Graphically, *BtR* looks like a mega-version of *BoB*: clouds move, night falls, formations drone, fighters "bounce," flak bursts, and bomb patterns ripple through German cities. The amount of visual information (with all filters set to "on") can be overwhelming until you get used to it. If you're unable to see clearly, or experience jerky animation, I'd suggest turning off the clouds first.

The payoff comes when you've finished your raid/defense planning and click on "go." Then you can sit back and watch the action unfold dramatically.

How many players will find the action to be worth all the time and trouble of the setup? Good question; no glib answer. Personally, I played longer and



It can be very exciting to watch a raid develop in intensity from takeoff to bombs-away to limping home.



Raid-plotting can be as intricate or as streamlined as you like.

had more fun than I did with *Battle of Britain* (the sheer vastness of the simulation exerted a strong initial appeal), but as before, there came a time when it all turned into a chore.

Other players, of course, will react differently, wallowing in all those details like hippos in a mud bath. *Bombing the Reich* is not a lovable, warm-n-fuzzy game; it's intricate and full of sharp little edges. I respect it greatly, however, and heartily recommend it to anyone who has a strong interest in this aspect of World War Two.

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: The big campaigns pack in awesome detail.

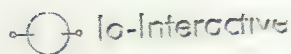
LOWS: Manual omits data; "awesome detail" turns into "numbing repetition."

BOTTOM LINE: It's definitely a hardcore wargame, but its depth is not likely to be surpassed in our lifetimes.

78%



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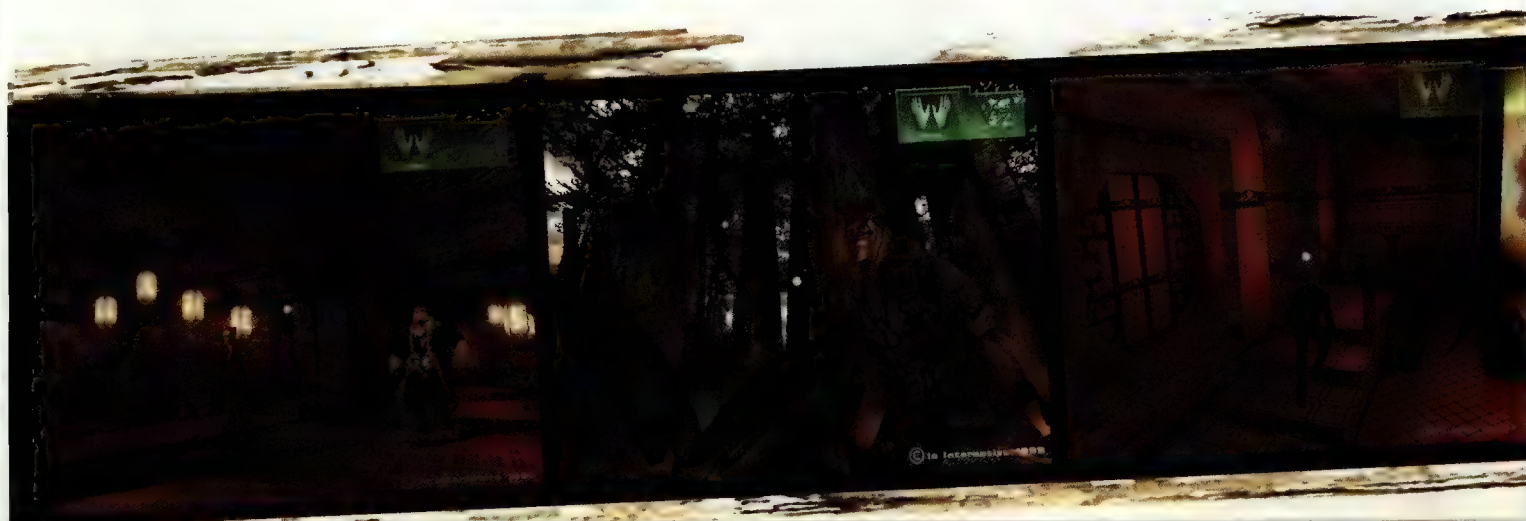
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Carnivores 2

CATEGORY: Action **DEVELOPER:** Action Forms **PUBLISHER:** Wizard Works, (425) 398-3051, www.wizworks.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space, 8X CD-ROM drive **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, Glide or Direct 3D-supported accelerator card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Did we really need another dinosaur hunting game? Apparently, Wizard Works thinks so.

For those not familiar with the *Carnivores* backstory (does it really need one?), a company called DinoHunt has discovered a planet filled with dinosaurs. They've decided the best way to exploit these previously extinct creatures is to charge people a huge fee for the privilege of heading planet-side to risk life and limb in order to experience the ultimate hunt. So, off you go to bag yourself some prehistoric trophies. Good enough?

To start things off, I must admit that this game sure is purty. The scenery is picturesque, lending the game the air of a real forest, and the wildlife is terrific; dinosaurs walk around and dig for food, pterodactyls cast shadows, and brontosaurus snack on plants by the shore. Everything looks great...until you notice that some of those dinos are flying right through the trees. Then you notice that others are clipping through the hills, through you, through each other, and so on. Okay, so there's some graphical glitches, but how is the gameplay?

Like most hunting games, you spend most of your time waiting around for prey. You start off hunting defenseless little herbivores — easy enough, but then you move on to more deadly game. Hunting raptors is one of the highlights of *Carnivores 2*. First you'll see one ahead of you, then you won't, and then



■ Not all herbivores are defenseless, as this friendly little dino is about to point out.

you'll be dead because it slinked around and jumped you from behind. Then there's the T-Rex, which you can only kill by shooting its eyes (realistic, huh?). You'll have access to a pistol, shotgun, double-barreled shotgun, a crossbow, a rifle, and a sniper rifle. Frankly, I'd be more comfortable going out with a 20mm cannon or a grenade launcher. The arsenal does feel limited, especially for a game set in the future, and you can't help but wonder if this is the kind of stuff a real hunter would want to use on gigantic prehistoric beasts.

Of course, this kind of game is not for the average *Quake* fan. Here, patience is as important as good aim. You'll have to learn to take the time necessary to get a clean shot at your prey. Of course, getting a clean shot is easier said than done, as every dinosaur in the game runs faster than you. However, I found that if you strafe and run at the same time, you're able to catch up with most of 'em. Unfortunately, your character seems to be very finicky about what kind of slopes he can and cannot climb. I found that by continuously hitting the jump button I'd be able to scale mountains that I normally wouldn't be able to climb. And for

some reason when you run sideways you move faster than you do when you run forward.



■ When you're this close to a raptor, you'd better have a shotgun ready to rock.

Engine and control quirks aside, and considering the low price, you definitely get what you pay for when you buy *Carnivores 2*; it does have its moments. There were plenty of times when I wanted to go out to get that elusive "one more kill" so I could qualify to hunt the T-Rex, and more than a few occasions when I was humbled by the AI behind some of those pesky raptors. I'll tell you, those scaly bastards are no pushovers. Fans of hunting games will — and should — snatch this one up in a

second, as it provides quite a different challenge than those pathetic, placid deer.

—Li Kuo



■ Yes, it does bite. No, you shouldn't feed it.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Nice graphics engine; good atmosphere; a change from hunting deer.

LOWS: Major clipping problems; gameplay gets slow; character control is iffy.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the better hunting games out there; not bad for the low price.

60%

Flanker 2.0



CATEGORY: Flight Sim **DEVELOPER:** Flying Legends **PUBLISHER:** SSI, (617) 761-3000, www.ssionline.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM drive, 500MB hard-drive space, Direct3D-compatible accelerator card, Windows-compatible sound card

WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 400, 128MB RAM, AGP accelerator card, Joystick, Throttle, Rudders **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 16

It may still have some rough spots, but *Flanker* remains the king of the hardcore flight sim hill.

It may be a year late, but *Flanker 2.0* was well worth the wait. Despite some minor warts (far fewer than *Falcon 4.0*'s), it's the kind of mind-bendingly complex, detailed, and satisfying sim that hardcore sim fans wish for but rarely receive.

The major changes from *Su-27 1.5* to *Flanker 2.0* most clearly impact graphics and multiplayer, but in fact every element of the game has been tuned and tweaked to a near razor's edge. Once again you have a sublimely perfect simulation of jet flight, with not only the Su-27 modeled, but also the Su-33 carrier-based variant. While I noticed no appreciable improvement in the flight model of 1.5 (which had little room to improve), systems and avionics seem sharper and more realistic. AI, both friendly and enemy, is some of the most satisfying you'll encounter.

It's disappointing, then, to find that more wingman commands have not been

implemented. Formation, attack my target, watch my six, and a couple other rudimentary commands are all that are offered. Considering the complexity of the rest of *Flanker*, this is hardly sufficient.

Gameplay is divided into the standard instant action, single missions, and campaign, with a mission editor for custom creation. The stand-alone missions are all quite good, but simmers who demand dynamic campaign systems will be sorely disappointed. I go back and forth on this issue, since a well-scripted campaign is as good as a dynamic battlefield, which can have its own set of problems. In the end, I was perfectly satisfied with the diverse array of missions and the ebb and flow of the branching campaign. Multiplayer furballs are smooth and largely error-free. The most noticeable problems were very slight warping and an annoying inability to lock onto incoming missiles.

The graphics, from object and terrain modeling to explosions, are unbelievably good on the highest levels and very good on lower levels. Cockpits are fully 3D, yet smooth and with completely readable gauges. Padlock view may cause some consternation because it's a little *too* realistic: objects must be in visible range to padlock. The detail is continually surprising, with a game-world that feels real and alive. You pay for this dearly, however, with steep sys-

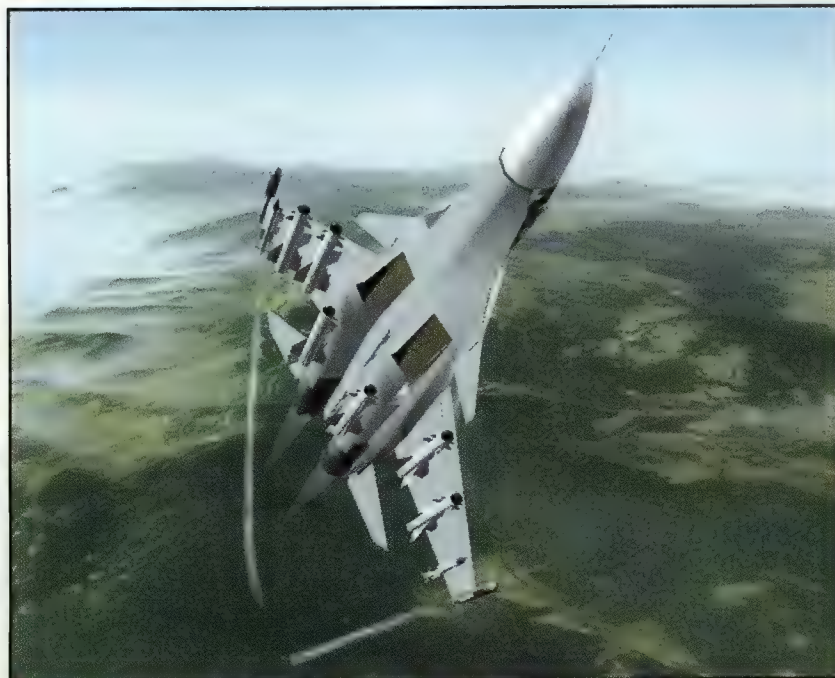


Flanker's free scrolling cockpit is both fluid and clear. Oh yes, and it's in Russian, so practice your Cyrillic.

tem requirements. Non-AGP cards perform poorly and 3Dfx cards barely perform at all. Bizarre work-arounds are offered in the readme file, such as replacing Glide drivers with older versions. SSI says this is because the Glide drivers changed as the game was being mastered, and a patch is in the works.

One final thing: After writing this review I found an incredible volume of negative comments on the Internet, including a couple of complete web sites devoted to spreading misinformation about *Flanker*. These can all be traced back to a fired beta tester, so consider them for what they are worth. Ignore the flame wars and count yourself lucky to be a hardcore flight sim fan with *Flanker 2.0*. For all the bitching, it's a far more stable and finished product than *Falcon 4.0*, despite some bugs. Be clear about this much, however: *Flanker* is most definitely not for everyone, and positively not for novices. A massive amount of work must go into learning this bugger, but the curve is sharply reduced thanks to detailed documentation and incredible narrated, cinematic, in-game training sequences for every single facet of the aircraft. That pays dividends in some of the best flight combat moments you'll ever experience on a PC.

—T. Liam McDonald



The Flanker shows its claws, as well as a good view of some of that sweet, rolling terrain.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Bar none, the finest systems and flight models around; detailed game world.

LOWS: Big problems with 3Dfx-based cards; monstrous system requirements.

BOTTOM LINE: Despite rough edges, *Flanker 2.0* is the best hardcore sim on the market.

89%

TOCA 2

CATEGORY: Racing **DEVELOPER:** Codemasters **PUBLISHER:** Activision, (310) 255-2000, www.activision.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, 55MB hard-drive space, DirectX 6.0-supported 3D graphics card (PCI/AGP) with 4MB RAM **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM drive **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 8

The PC's latest motorfest is a blessed marriage of arcade and sim. Do you have the asphalt love?

Racing games that try to blur the line between simulation and arcade generally crash and burn before they even leave the starting line. Titles like EA's *NASCAR Revolution* or Intense Entertainment's abysmal *Johnny Herbert's Grand Prix World Champions* offer clear testament to just how awry some of these attempts can go. This checkered history would suggest that blending the two genres is a dubious proposition at best — so it's nice to see a new product that actually manages to get it right.

For the most part, Codemasters' *Touring Car Challenge 2 (TOCA 2)* does just that. This well-crafted sequel to one of the best-selling racing games of 1998 is an extremely entertaining and challenging arcade/sim hybrid that, but for a few physics modeling issues, runs circles around anything else in its unique genre. Based on the professional RAC British Touring Car Championship, *TOCA 2* features full licensing from the BTTC and several of the works teams that compete in this prestigious series. Hammering a four-door Volvo sedan around some soaking wet English circuit may not seem terribly glamorous, but the intense competition and enormous factory support the series receives from major European and Japanese automakers has made it almost as popular in Britain as NASCAR is here in the U.S.

TOCA 2 delivers considerable game-play depth for both serious and casual racing fans. Solo play options include time trial events, arcade challenges, single races and full championships, while the game's multiplayer alternatives range from console-style split-screen events to eight-player Internet contests. One unfortunate carry-over from the console version (along with a curious lack of mouse support in the game's menus) is an annoying championship progression format that requires you to attain a certain placing in each event in order to advance to the next round.

Sixteen cars make up the grid for each race and the AI competition can pose quite a significant challenge at the higher difficulty levels. Although not as



Forget Formula One — Touring Car competition offers fender-to-fender Euro-racing at its best.



Damage modeling is fully implemented and will affect window glass as well as body panels.

criminally aggressive as they were in the first *TOCA*, the CPU-driven cars are still quite formidable, and much of the entertainment value in the game comes from the lengthy fender-to-fender duels you get to enjoy with these almost human-like opponents.

As with its parent game, *TOCA 2* emphasizes on-track action over technical racecraft, so you won't find any complex garage menus or detailed telemetry screens here. The physics modeling for each of the cars is fairly unsophisticated and does a somewhat poor job of simulating front-wheel drive vehicle dynamics. Although the game does model brake lock-ups quite convincingly, the absence of any proper understeer response can make the cars extremely touchy in some of the higher speed corners (where a vicious snap oversteer has been tossed in almost as an afterthought). Once you learn to drive around this annoyance, however, the driving physics are quite forgiving and relatively easy to master.

Licensed vehicles in the game include models from Volvo, Vauxhall, Audi, Nissan, Ford, Honda, Peugeot, and

Renault, and each car is closely matched for overall speed and performance. Codemasters has also fleshed out the driving options by including a number of bonus vehicles and classes such as Ford Fiestas, Lidster Storms and even some riotously entertaining Van Diemen Formula Ford single-seaters.

Graphically, *TOCA 2* shines like a bright penny. The game's Direct3D-accelerated visuals feature real-time lighting and reflection effects coupled with some remarkably detailed car and track

renderings. There is also a full VCR-style replay screen and a wide selection of viewing perspectives — including a cockpit view that animates all of the driver's arm motions à la *Grand Prix Legends*. Eight licensed British road racing circuits have been included in the collection of tracks (there are also a handful of locked fictional tracks) and each has been rendered in impressive photorealistic detail. Turn on the remarkable weather effects and these venues are positively transformed, as driving rain beads off the windshield and lightning storms flash menacingly in the background. There isn't another racing game out there that even comes close to delivering this level of realism and immersion with its weather modeling.

While the original *TOCA* was an impressive title in its own right, *TOCA 2* advances the gameplay value of the franchise for racing fans of all stripes. Once you adapt to its curious driving physics, the upgraded graphics and sound, well-rendered cars and tracks, and extremely entertaining AI combine to create one of the more wickedly enjoyable racing experiences you're likely to find in any PC driving environment — arcade or simulation.

—Andy Mahood

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Sparkling graphics; aggressive AI; terrific weather effects; good variety of cars and tracks.

LOWES: Weak physics modeling; arcade-style championship progression.

BOTTOM LINE: A hybrid sim/arcade racer that delivers the best of both genres.

83%

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Sid Meier's Antietam!

CATEGORY: Strategy **DEVELOPER:** Breakaway Games **PUBLISHER:** Firaxis, (877) 347-2947, www.firaxis.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 90, 32MB RAM, 70MB hard-drive space, 2X CD-ROM drive **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 166, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, LAN, Maximum players: 8

The pseudo-sequel to *Gettysburg!* retains the qualities — and flaws — of the original.

Sid Meier's *Gettysburg!* remains a brilliant and unique wargame experience despite its age. Instead of modeling Civil War tactics in a traditional turn-based fashion, Meier chose to make you feel warfare as well as think it. The action occurred in real-time, but resource management wasn't a factor. Instead you had to use 19th-century tactics like battle lines, enfilade and flanking, and be able to react to changing battlefield conditions at a moment's notice. The result was a game that showcased the chaos of warfare, the horror of a crushed line, and the rabble of routed men in a less dispassionate manner than most wargames. Fans demanded more, and Firaxis has now followed through with *Sid Meier's Antietam!*.

Antietam, known as Sharpsburg to the Confederates, was the single bloodiest day in American history (*Gettysburg* remains the bloodiest battle). *Antietam!* adds new terrain and some new regimental types (such as the colorful Zouaves and Sharpshooters) to the already robust, deep, and replayable *Gettysburg!* game engine. There are multiple historical variants and "what-if" scenarios offered, and



The entire day's battle is available as one scenario.

all the artificial intelligence and difficulty options are present in this new incarnation. Also added is a huge amount of historical documentation on the battle and the war, including the complete never-before-published battle report from commander Ezra Carmen, which alone makes *Antietam!* worth the purchase to any serious Civil War buff.

But the graphics engine, artificial intelligence, and interface remain virtually unchanged. *Antietam!* uses the same graphics engine as the original, and as such retains some of the animation quirks and visual choppyness prevalent in *Gettysburg!*. The interface has been tweaked slightly, with improvements such as the ability to equip artillery with canister shot, but largely remains the same. Artillery can now fire into the edges of woods, regiments can only cross rivers and streams at fords or bridges, and line-of-sight and volley commands have been made more realistic. Most fan concerns

have been addressed, but *Gettysburg!* also received complaints about problems involving selecting the right troops — sometimes it seemed impossible to click on the desired regimental flag in the heat of battle. *Antietam!* tries to improve on this by requiring you to click that flag, then click it again to give movement orders. While this prevents common mistakes where you would move the wrong regiment, it creates new mistakes where you unwittingly order the last regiment you moved when trying to position the next one.

This sort of counter-intuitive addition can be fatal in battle.

Antietam! offers the entire one-day battle, quarter- and half-day battles, a random scenario generator (you choose your side and the size of the engagement) and the entire engagement divided into small scenarios. The problem here is that the *Gettysburg!* engine wasn't optimized to handle huge time-consuming battles, and *Antietam!* inherits this problem in full. The full and half-day scenarios are unwieldy until you learn exactly when new troops become available. Since the game often displays these troops on the map from the start, it can be extremely difficult

to plan a coordinated assault. Also, *Gettysburg!* offered the entire battle in scenarios connected by briefings and maps showing the action. As a centerpiece to the game, these scenarios unfolded either historically or based upon your performance. Fail as Lee and you got Pickett's Charge, but succeed and you got to harass the Union retreat to Washington as your finale. *Antietam!* fails to offer this sort of immersive campaign. You just get the scenarios one at a time from a menu list.

Interestingly, you won't find *Antietam!* in stores, as it's only being sold directly from the Firaxis website. This is definitely a case of Firaxis and Sid Meier going out of their way to support a limited but devoted fanbase. That by itself is admirable. The problem is that despite not requiring *Gettysburg!*, *Antietam!* looks and plays like an add-on that should have been released two years ago. This makes it hard to recommend to anyone who isn't already a die-hard Civil War buff and/or *Gettysburg!* fanatic. Still, a wargame this innovative and deep is rare, despite the age of its engine. If Firaxis follows through with its plan to release a series of games this way (*Sid Meier's Great Battles* is the proposed title at this point), let's hope the entire game engine gets the upgrade it so desperately needs. Otherwise it will never offer more than niche appeal.

—Andrew S. Bub



In the full-day scenario, both sides fight a pitched battle over the East Woods. The Confederates eventually held, but at substantial cost.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Improvements to the old engine; extensive documentation; scenario generator.

75%

LOWS: Lacks a dynamic campaign; additions to game engine are largely subtle.

BOTTOM LINE: A boon to hard-core fans of the original — but probably no one else.

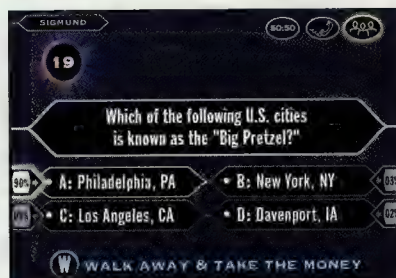
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire

CATEGORY: Trivia **DEVELOPER:** Jellyvision **PUBLISHER:** Disney Interactive, (800) 228-0988, www.abc.go.com/primetime/millionaire **REQUIRED:** P133, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 160MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** P200, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Hot seat, Max. players: 10 for fastest finger round

I love *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. It is, simply, the ultimate TV game show; while others tried (and failed) to hook audiences with ever more elaborate ideas, *Millionaire* brilliantly distilled the quiz-show concept to its simplest, most compelling form. Disney smartly hired *You Don't Know Jack* developer Jellyvision to apply its trivia-game expertise to this CD-ROM adaptation, and the result is a somewhat bare-bones but nevertheless satisfying adaptation.

The game is a faithful copy of the show, though things are a tad basic — there's little chrome beyond some rendered animations of the show's (deserted) set, and the familiar melodramatic music. A voice-over Regis Philbin is on hand to introduce the questions, but unlike the host in *You Don't Know Jack*, you don't actually hear him ask them — sure to disappoint die-hard fans of The Reege (such as myself, a proud owner of his 1968 album "It's Time For Regis"). Only the phone-a-friend lifeline, in which Regis chit-chats with a virtual buddy, gives some indication of the atmosphere Jellyvision could have created, given more time and resources.

Despite its threadbare production,



Just like on the TV show, you have three lifelines to help you with tricky questions.

Millionaire exhibits the same inexplicable allure as the TV show — my games attracted unprecedented crowds of onlookers from all over the Imagine Media office. Arguments erupted over answers, cries of "Nooooo!" went up in unison as Regis, after his now-trademark interminable pause, said "I'm so sorry, that's not the correct answer"...we even did a frantic real-life "phone-a-friend" when confronted with a particularly thorny million-dollar question. All proof that the game must be doing *something* right, no matter how simple it may be.

The game's only stumbling point might be its apparent paucity of questions. The packaging refuses to reveal how many there are, stating only that there are "hundreds" (which probably means under a thousand; far less than a typical *You Don't Know Jack*). It would be great if users could download new questions, but Disney, knowing a hit when it sees one, is more likely to milk this property with sequels and expansion packs. Still, for a meager \$19.99, this is ideal party-game fodder, and since it's probably the closest you'll ever come to sitting in the hotseat, it comes recommended.

—Gary Whitta

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Captures the fun and tension of the TV show well.

78%

LOWS: Production values are basic; we need more Regis! Questions won't last forever.

BOTTOM LINE: Fans of the show will love this opportunity to sit in the hotseat, so grab some buds (and some Buds) and enjoy!

Expert Pool

CATEGORY: Sports sim **DEVELOPER:** Visual Sciences **PUBLISHER:** Psygnosis, 415-655-5683, www.psygnosis.com **REQUIRED:** P133, 32MB RAM, 108MB hard-drive space, 4X CD-ROM **WE RECOMMEND:** PII 266, 64MB RAM, TNT2 **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, Free Internet play: Mplayer, Maximum players: 2

I've marveled at Paul Newman in *The Color of Money* and survived hours in pool halls so thick with rancid smoke there's a government health warning on the door. I've attracted the ardor of a comely older woman, dazzled by a paper-thin cut on the eight-ball into to the middle pocket. I've even impressed the security guys in the games room of the Playboy mansion with a bank shot (*Er, yeah right — Ed.*). But never have I learned a damn thing about the finer points of pool from a PC



Trickshots are stored to watch and then replay so you can look good for the chicks.

game. Psygnosis' *Expert Pool* doesn't offer many technical insights either, nor any real character, instead focusing on getting the physics down and supplying plenty of gameplay options.

The physics are excellent, with the most obvious enhancement being the balls' ability to jump (though you can't do a traditional jump shot due to the nature of the control method). Now, not only are the balls solid objects, but the table has substance too (perhaps this addition was deemed necessary by the evident — and occasionally overbearing — presence of table manufacturer Kasson as a co-sponsor). When powered by 3D hardware, you get some cool reflections and a real look of depth to the balls.

There's a staggering array of pool variants. Four variations of 8-ball (3 US and one UK) are supported along with 9-ball, 3-, 6- and 10-ball. Speed pool, straight and French pool can also be played, among others.

Like the drab backdrops, the tournaments also lack life. In practice and in competition you'll be pitted against any of the 198 opponents who are distinguished by tweaks to their look and by their percentage-rated abilities in a vari-

ety of pool skills like safety, positioning, banking, and long shots. For the hardcore, *Expert Pool* supports the InterAct Pool cue peripheral that lets you use a real cue instead of the traditional mouse-shoving control method.

Perhaps "character" is asking too much of a pool sim, but other sports games are packing in more and more of this elusive yet crucial element as technology improves. The potential entertainment value of roleplaying and character progression playing as, say, Paul Newman's "Fast" Eddie Felson is an opportunity we'll just have to wait for.

—Rob Smith

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Solid physics; detailed stat tracking; customizable character; large number of opponents.

64%

LOWS: Disappointing background settings; few Internet opponents; no soul.

BOTTOM LINE: You're getting a good, but lifeless, pool sim that could use some character.

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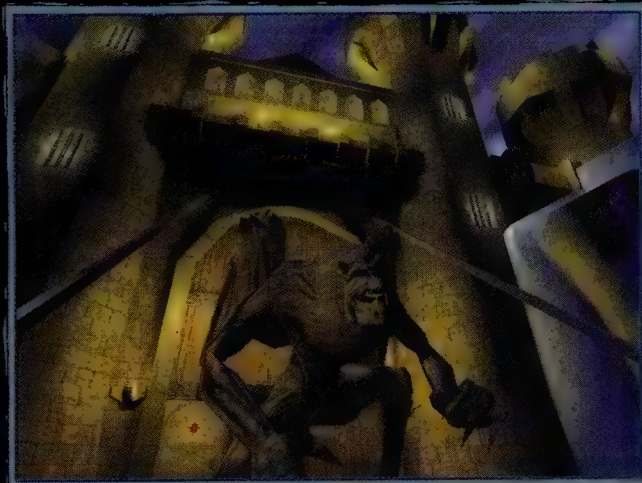


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HARDSTUFF

THE HARDWARE GUIDE THAT DOESN'T PULL ANY PUNCHES

FEBRUARY 2000



MOTION BLUR:

Smooth motion to improve image quality or to exaggerate motion for special effects...just one of the hot new features you'll see in the new Voodoo5s. (Artist's conception)

The New **Voodooos...**

Blurring the Line Between Graphics and Reality

Home Network:

Diamond has a solution that is perfect for gamers and small businesses alike.

Control Yourself!

Saitek and Gravis have two new controllers. Are they worth the cash? Details inside.

Hot Reviews:

Four new sound cards from Aureal and Creative Labs that'll rock your world!

Porn to Party in Las Vegas



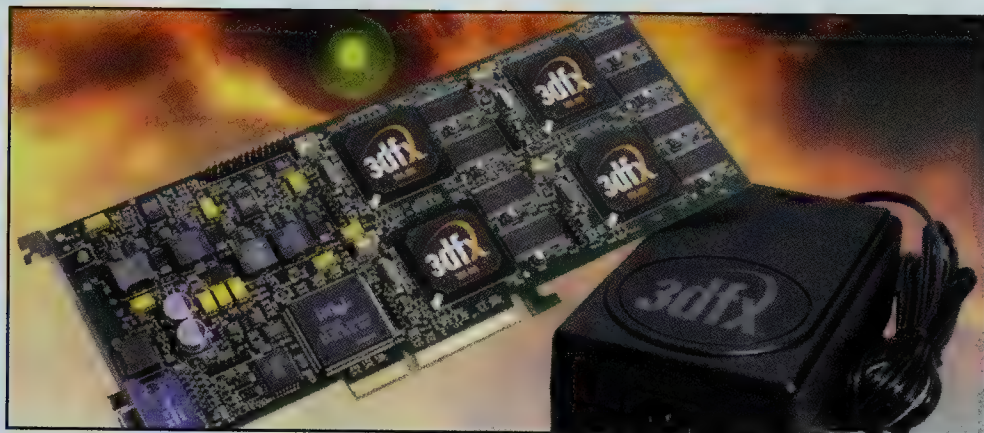
Having just returned from Las Vegas, home of this year's Comdex convention, I must inform you all that I have a new favorite vacation spot. I don't know if it was simply because 250,000 computer geeks had flooded the city for the one-week tech-fest, and the populous just wanted to cash-in on our collective single-ness (we tech guys tend to be single for some strange reason), but in addition to the computer hardware being shown in the convention centers, there was porn for as far as the eye could see.

Here in the bay area we have newspaper vending machines that dispense erotic papers to passers by willing to cough up a buck or two for a quick fix (er, or so I've been told), but in Vegas, these type of papers are free — and they're much more explicit. And even if you don't want to look at them, you can't help but get sucked in because there are more copies of these periodicals cluttering the streets and walkways than there are cars and pedestrians!

When I wasn't looking at porn or losing the shirt off my back in a poker game, I did manage to pop into the convention centers from time to time to see what all the hubbub was about. I saw a lot of great things, but the coolest information I walked away with was the specs for 3dfx's new Voodoo4 and 5 lines of video cards. All built using the same core chip(s), the new Voodoos are a bit different from what I was expecting — look to our preview on page 135 for details. Oh, and hey...nobody tell my mom about any of this porn stuff, okay?

Greg Vederman, technical editor

The New Voodoos...



3dfx has finally broken its silence on the upcoming Voodoo4 and Voodoo5 and we've got the information you crave including specs, pricing, and availability. Interested? We thought so. **PAGE 135**

REVIEWS

- **GRAVIS XTERMINATOR DUAL CONTROL** **PAGE 138**
Similar to Mad Katz's Panther XL, the Dual Control makes some changes to the traditional joystick with impressive results.
- **DIAMOND HOMEFREE NETWORK** **PAGE 138**
Looking for a new way to network your PCs? Diamond has the goods to get you up and running with ease.
- **SAITEK P120 GAMEPAD** **PAGE 139**
If you're in need of a comfortable, inexpensive gamepad, Saitek's latest fits the bill.
- **SAITEK R100 RACING WHEEL** **PAGE 139**
Looking a heck-of-a-lot like Microsoft's excellent racing wheel, the R100 feels good and has a price that won't break the bank.
- **AUREAL SOUND CARDS** **PAGE 140**
Aureal goes out on its own and releases two new sound cards. Do they stand up to the competition?
- **CREATIVE LABS SOUND CARDS** **PAGE 140**
Like Aureal, Creative has just launched a new line of sound cards. Aureal or Creative: Which one will you choose?

How We Rate the Hard Stuff

You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication *Maximum PC*. Between our testing and the BenchMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

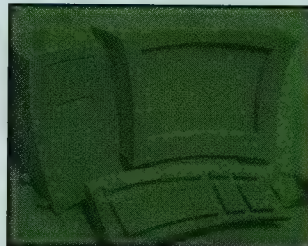
PC Gamer's Editors' Choice Awards

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the PCG Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.



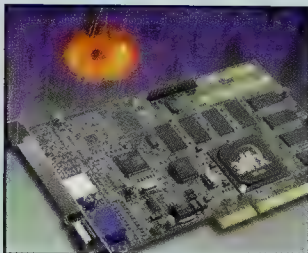
TRINITY

Check out all the up-to-date parts and prices *PC Gamer* recommends for low-end, mid-range, and high-end systems! **PAGE 143**



TECH Q&A

The reports of Dear Greg's death have been exaggerated. In-line with the new format, this month's tech Q&A will be accompanied by a single Dear Greg letter. Is it a doozie? You bet!... **PAGE 144**



Gratuitous Violence is 200 Times Faster With a D-Link Network Than With Online Games.



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No light but rather darkness visible"

-Paradise Lost

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a MILLENNIUM chronicle

Coming Spring 2000

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The New Voodoos

3dfx officially announces Voodoo4 and 5 at this year's Comdex in Las Vegas

Of all the appointments we had at this year's Comdex convention in Las Vegas none were more important than getting to the Venetian Hotel's wax museum bright and early on the morning of November 15th. This was the spot that 3dfx had chosen to announce its new Voodoo cards, and we weren't going to miss it for the world.

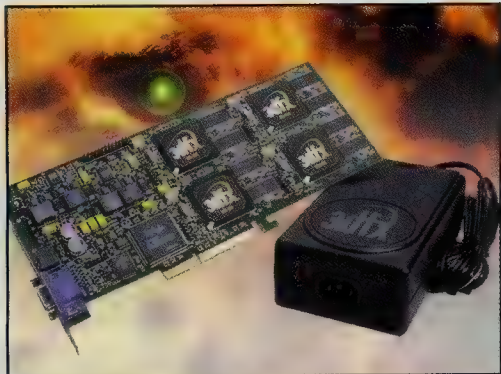
Among other things, we learned that Voodoo4 and 5 (formerly known as Napalm) will actually hit the streets concurrently (give or take a couple weeks) during the first quarter of 2000. We also learned that, contrary to rumors, 3dfx did not implement any sort of T&L engine (similar to the

one in the GeForce) into this generation of accelerators. Expect that feature to come a bit later down the road.

Without T&L, do these cards have what it takes to be GeForce 256 killers? It's too tough to tell right now, as even at this late date, 3dfx has yet to receive preliminary hardware samples; and everything we've been shown thus far has been running on emulation systems. Let's just put it this way: 3dfx has been blowing the fill rate horn long and hard for the past several months, and on paper, some of the Voodoo5s offer the most outrageous fill rates we've ever seen. If 3dfx ends up delivering what it has now promised, 2000 is going to be one

hell of a year for 3D graphics.

3dfx announced 5 different SKUs at Comdex. Below is a list of what they are and how much you can expect to pay for them. Look to these pages for even more information in the coming months.



The Voodoo5 6000 draws so much current that it requires its own power adapter to assure reliable operation.

GLOSSARY

VSA-100: Short for Voodoo Scalable Architecture, this is 3dfx's newest Voodoo chip. It is everything that Voodoo 3 was and more. As many as 32 VSA-100 chips can be used in parallel, each one with as much as 32MB RAM. In multiple-chip solutions, a new SLI-like technology is employed to make all the chips function together. The one downside is that each chip in a multi-chip card will have to repeat the same texture information, thus cutting down a bit on actual usable memory.

FXT1 and DirectX Texture Compression: FXT1 is 3dfx's own, totally free texture compression technology. DirectX Texture Compression is the version of S3's S3TC that is integrated into DirectX (DXTC). Both technologies allow for higher resolution (better looking/less fuzzy) textures by greatly reducing memory bandwidth. Without either of these two technologies, large texture support in true 32-bit color wouldn't be possible on the hardware of today given current memory constraints.

2k x 2k textures (large texture support): All Voodoos up until the 4 and 5 only supported a maximum texture size of 256x256 pixels, thus making most textures in games look fuzzy and washed-out. The new Voodoos support textures as large as 2,048 x 2,048 pixels (2k x 2k, for short), and so games that are made with these larger textures will look much prettier.

Real-time full-scene hardware anti-aliasing: Just about every video card out

there claims to anti-alias, but the truth is, in almost every case it's merely a software-driven driver hack that eats up a lot of CPU cycles and that doesn't even look very good. In order to add true hardware-based full-scene AA (whereby jagged lines and flashing objects are removed from 3D images), the Voodoo card in question must have at least 2 VSA-100 chips, and that's why only the Voodoo5s support this feature.

T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effects (all done in hardware):

A) Motion Blur: Common in television and film, motion blurring is one of the main reasons why the human eye can't tell that the images on-screen are only being updated at 24 frames per second. Because computer animation doesn't rely on this feature, considerably more frames must be rendered each second for us to perceive fluid motion.

B) Depth of Field Blur: Also common in TV and film, this effect creates a more realistic image on-screen by blurring all but the most important objects in a scene — just as a real camera lens would. Game developers will have full control over what objects are in focus and which ones aren't.

C) Soft Shadows: Yet another effect that attempts to bridge the gap between computer games and cinema, this effect adds soft edges to shadows to give them a much more realistic appearance.

All new Voodoos share the following features:

Fully integrated 128-bit 2D/3D video accelerator
FXT1 and DirectX Texture Compression
32-bit rendering
32-bit textures
24-bit Z-buffer
8-bit stencil buffer
2k x 2k textures (large texture support)
350MHz RAMDAC
API support: DirectX, OpenGL, and Glide
Driver Support: Windows 95, 98, NT4.0, and Windows 2000

Voodoo4 4500 PCI and AGP (2X/4X without AGP texturing)

Single VSA-100 Processor
32MB SDRAM
Fill Rate: 333-367 Megapixels per second (dependent on final speed of chips)
Expected Price at Retail: \$179

Voodoo5 5000 PCI

Dual VSA-100 Processors
32MB SDRAM
Fill Rate: 667-733 Megapixels per second (dependent on final speed of chips)
Real-time full-scene hardware anti-aliasing
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Motion Blur
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Depth of Field Blur
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Soft Reflections
Expected Price at Retail: \$229

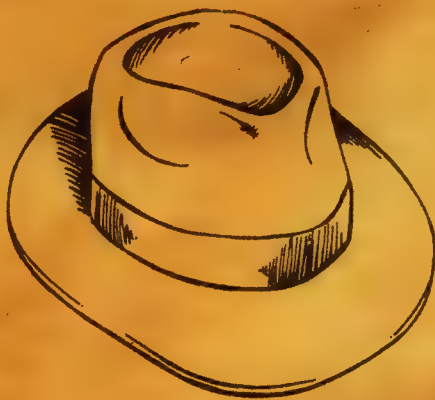
Voodoo5 5500 AGP (2X/4X without AGP texturing)

Dual VSA-100 Processors
64MB SDRAM
Fill Rate: 667-733 Megapixels per second (dependent on final speed of chips)
Real-time full-scene hardware anti-aliasing
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Motion Blur
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Depth of Field Blur
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Soft Reflections
Expected Price at Retail: \$299

Voodoo5 6000 AGP (2X/4X without AGP texturing)

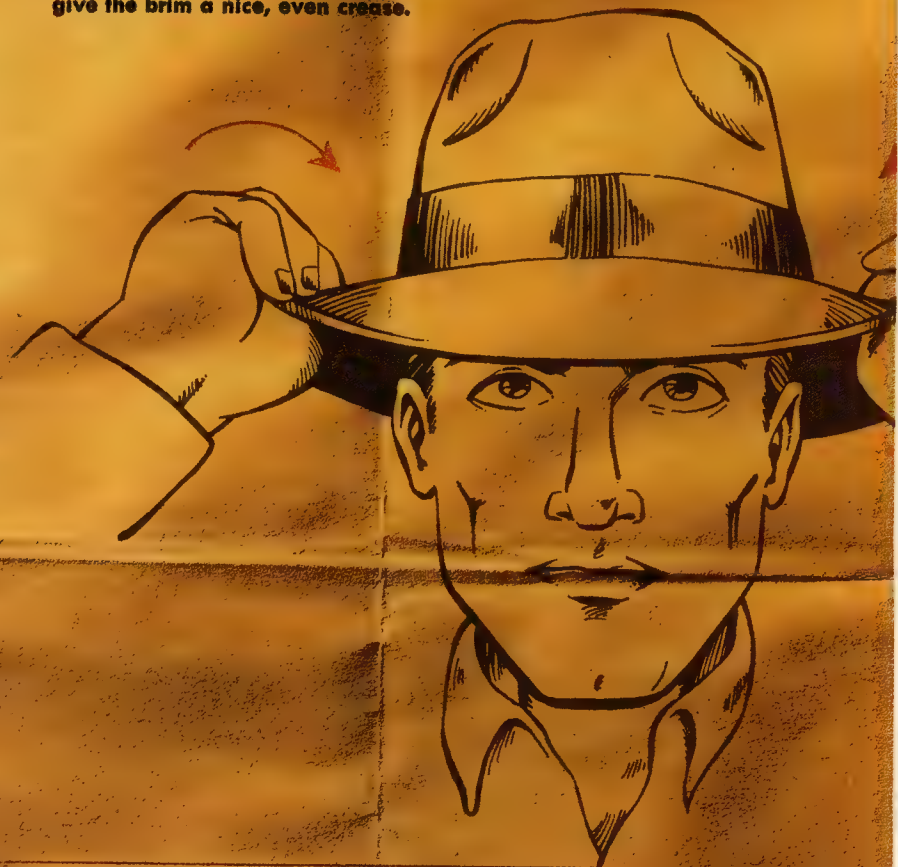
Quad VSA-100 Processors
128MB SDRAM
Fill Rate: 1.32-1.47 Gigapixels per second (dependent on final speed of chips)
Real-time full-scene hardware anti-aliasing
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Motion Blur
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Depth of Field Blur
T-Buffer Digital Cinematic Effect: Soft Reflections
Expected Price at Retail: \$599

HOW TO BREAK IN A FEDORA:



① Make sure each side of the crown has a smooth, curved indent.

② For a look that says you've got places to go and bad guys to hurt, give the brim a nice, even crease.



EXPERT METHODS:

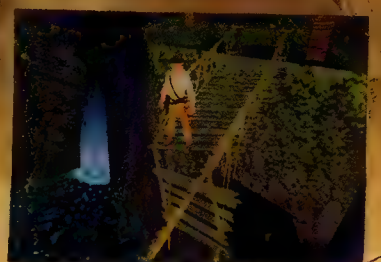
④ Canine chew toy.



⑤ Mine shaft wind shear.



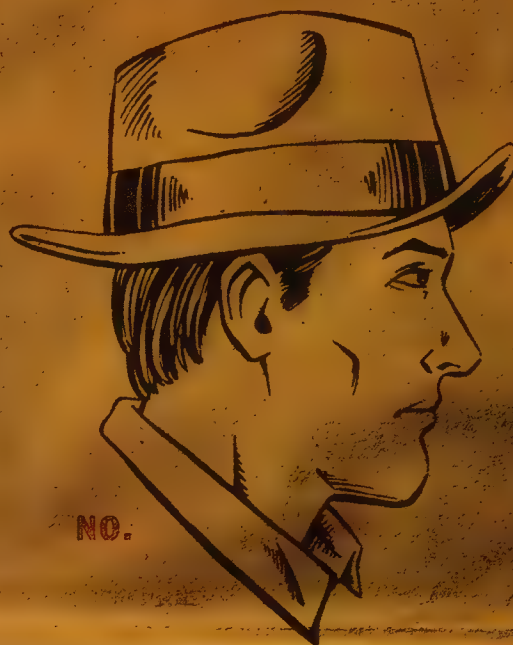
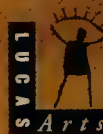
⑥ High altitude bridge-hopping.



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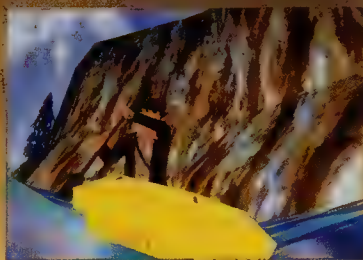


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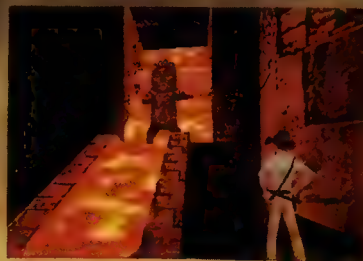


- ③ Never, under any circumstances, turn the brim up. Remember, you want to look like a stud archaeologist, not some guy named Cletus.

- ⑦ Raging H₂O soaks.



- ⑧ Lava vapor treatments.



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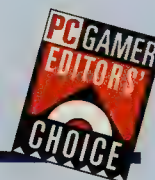
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■ GRAVIS

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COMPANY

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PRICE

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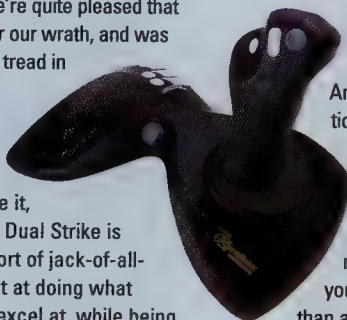
OTHER OPTIONS

If you're looking for more of a traditional joystick — or any joystick at all, really — here's a list of several manufacturers you should visit on the web:

Microsoft:
www.microsoft.com/
sidewinder
Logitech:
www.logitech.com
Saitek: www.saitek.com
CH Products: www.ch
products.com
Suncom: www.suncom-
inc.com

It's a bit ironic, really. While we love innovation, we're often forced to lambast controller manufacturers for breaking the mold, or reinventing the wheel if you will, since many times a "fresh, new idea" in controller design ends up being much worse than a standard gamepad, mouse, or in this case, joystick. In this case, though, we're quite pleased that Gravis didn't fear our wrath, and was brave enough to tread in this minefield.

Like the handy-dandy Xterminator Gamepad before it, the Xterminator Dual Strike is intended as a sort of jack-of-all-trades. It's great at doing what other joysticks excel at, while being equally good at doing things you'd never expect a joystick to do at all. If we had to compare this stick to something else on the market, we'd have to say that it's most like Mad Katz's Panther XL, in that



it has the equivalent of a built-in mouse device that makes it useful in sims and first-person shooters alike. Though very similar to each other, we now prefer the Gravis stick — its mouse device is easier to come to grips with than the Panther's large trackball.

At its simplest, the Dual Control is a 9-button joystick, complete with a throttle and dual POV hats — an 8-way and a 4-way. And in this most basic configuration, Gravis' stick performs admirably. The stick feels comfortable in the hands, has good tension, and all the buttons are placed in easy-to-reach locations. But it's when you use the Dual control as more than a standard joystick that it really starts to shine. Through Gravis' exceptional programming software, what would otherwise be a 4-way hat can actually become a mouse — functioning not just in games, but in Windows, too! Playing com-

bat sims and first-person shooters like the included full version of *Tribes* is made all the more easy in this configuration, and because of the way the stick's buttons are laid out, veterans should have little difficulty in laying out their control schemes in much the same way as they would on a keyboard.

Our only real complaint here is that the stick didn't seem to want to function under USB, so if you're interested in picking up a Dual Strike, make sure you plug it into your gameport, instead. Oh, and we'll try to keep an open mind from now on.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Extra features are actually beneficial; works great as a standard joystick.

LOWS Still not as good as a mouse and keyboard for first person shooters; wouldn't work in a USB slot.

BOTTOM LINE Regardless of the genre you're into, if you're looking for a new joystick, definitely give the Dual Strike a try. You won't be disappointed.

■ DIAMOND

HomeFree Phoneline USB

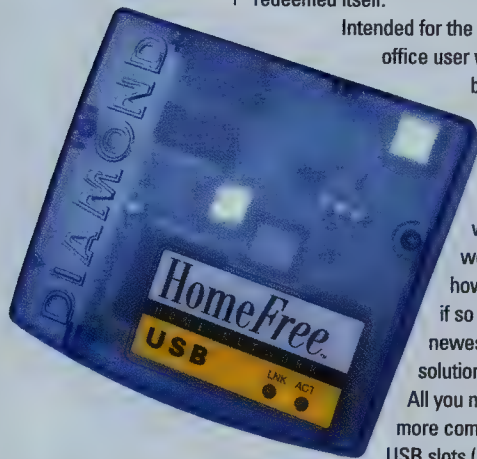


COMPANY

Diamond Multimedia,
(800) 468-5846,
www.diamondmm.com

PRICE

\$69.99 (M.S.R.P.)



We're here at the Hard Stuff are often wary of any home networking solution that doesn't involve standard network cards — and for good reason. Many of the alternate solutions we've tried have been less than stellar, including Diamond's own HomeFree Wireless kits. With the HomeFree Phoneline USB, however, Diamond has redeemed itself.

Intended for the home or small office user who can't be bothered with configuring network cards and protocols (or who simply wouldn't know how to do so even if so inclined), this newest HomeFree solution is a godsend. All you need is two or more computers with USB slots (as many as 25

can be connected), Windows 98 (you'll probably want to keep a copy of the CD close by during the installation process since it will be required a time or two), the device itself, and a standard phone line connection (all the same phone number), and you're in business.

Diamond's software really does remove the fear of networking by installing all the protocols you'll ever need to share folders, drives, and printers. It even assigns your computer a unique IP address for those pesky TCP/IP network games, and all this is accomplished during the initial software setup. In the past, we've tested "easy to use" home networking kits that showed you how to assign the network device an IP address, but we've never actually seen one that goes ahead and does the job for you. The setup was over and done with so quickly we were left feeling like there should be something more to do. But that's the beauty part; there really isn't!

At 1Mbps, you aren't getting the speeds normally associated with conventional NIC-based network that zip along at

either 10Mbps or 100Mbps, but when you consider that most network games are made to run optimally on modems as slow as 28.8kbps, 1Mbps is plenty fast. We tested all sorts of games over our Phoneline network, and they all went off without a hitch.

Diamond's HomeFree solution isn't for everyone, though. There's simply no comparison to all of the extra speed and compatibility one gets with a standard NIC card. Also, many such cards will cost less than a single HomeFree Phoneline unit. But if you're looking for a simple, no fuss solution, Diamond's latest is tough to beat.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Easy to use and simple to setup; automatically assigns separate IP addresses to all connected computers.

LOWS Requires multiple phone jacks all running on the same line (phone number).

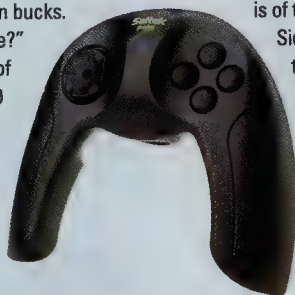
BOTTOM LINE Diamond's HomeFree Phoneline USB is one of the best (and easiest) home networking solutions we've seen to date.

SAITEK

P120 gamepad

Will wonders never cease? After playing with Saitek's \$50 R100 racing wheel (reviewed below) and being terribly disappointed that the unit didn't ship with any software drivers, imagine our surprise when we first encountered Saitek's P120 gamepad. We figured, "Hell, the damned thing's only ten bucks. How good could it really be?" Don't let the sticker price of this pad fool you; the P120 comes ready to play.

Unlike its wheel-based cousin, the P120 actually manages to ship with driver software — but that's not all. The drivers install two different profiles to your Control Panel; one is digital, and the other analog. That's right, this pad goes both ways, baby! The digital mode is great for action/twitch games, while the analog mode is better suited to racing games and their ilk since precise control is more important than speed. If you're looking for fancy utility software,



you should look elsewhere — switching between analog and digital modes requires that you actually replace one driver profile with the other. It's a bit of a pain, but come on! This thing is under 10 bucks!

Like the majority of the gamepads coming down the pike these days, the P120 is of the Batarang/Microsoft SideWinder variety, and even though it's inexpensive, it still manages to be one of the more comfortable controllers on the market. For added comfort and control, the unit even ships with a small thumb-joystick attachment that can be attached to the middle of the 8-way D-pad. If you don't like this option, you can either throw the thing away, or stow it in its own little slot at the bottom of the pad.

We know what you're probably thinking: "Great, it's less than ten bucks, but it's only a four-button controller, right?" Wrong. You can't see them from

the picture, but this pad also has two flipper buttons on its underside — one on each side of the pad — very much like a SideWinder.

Everything sounds great so far, right? You're probably looking for the catch. There's really only one, which is that the four primary buttons on the front of the P120 are a bit more difficult to push than we might like. They're not terribly difficult or anything — they just require a bit more force than you're probably used to. When all is said and done, though, at ten bucks — or even thirty — there's a heck-of-a-lot to love about this gamepad.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Comfortable; very inexpensive; choice of either analog or digital; comes with driver software.

LOWS Buttons could be easier to depress; switching between analog and digital is a bit of a pain.

BOTTOM LINE There's got to be some mistake. The P120 is simply too good to be only \$9.99!

COMPANY

Saitek,
(310) 212-5412,
www.saitek.com

PRICE

\$9.95 (M.S.R.P.)

OTHER OPTIONS

In the ten-dollar price range, the P120 really doesn't have any competition. If you're interested in programming a lot of special moves into your gamepad, however, pads like Microsoft's SideWinder Gamepad (www.microsoft.com/sidewinder) and Logitech's WingMan Extreme Gamepad (www.logitech.com) will cost a bit more, but are well worth the extra green.

SAITEK

R100 Racing Wheel

Around this time last year, racing wheels were all the rage. Well, let's be a bit more precise — racing wheel manufacturers *believed* them to be all the rage and therefore released new models on what seemed like a weekly basis. Looking back, force feedback seems to have been the driving force (pardon the pun) behind the popularity. But now it seems the novelty has worn off; we certainly don't see any manufacturers stepping forward to release a "second generation" force feedback wheel. In fact, in the past several months (prior to the R100), we received no wheels at all. So now that the "era" of fancy, often-overpriced wheels has come and gone, we're entering a time where low-end, reasonably priced wheels can mop up. Enter Saitek.

Saitek has a history of licensing Microsoft's controller technology, so it's not surprising that its latest wheel looks very similar to Microsoft's design. This is

actually a good thing, because despite its incredibly small size, the wheel retains many of the positive features of the Microsoft force feedback wheel (minus the force feedback, of course). Most importantly, it's very com-



fortable to use, even during prolonged gaming sessions. What surprised us most is that, for a wheel with such a low price, it comes

with a decent set of pedals. They're small to be sure, but they get the job done.

Unfortunately, Saitek does manage to fudge things up in a couple of key areas. For starters, it didn't see fit to create any software drivers for the wheel, so you're forced to go and set this beauty up yourself (following the instructions in the whopping two-page manual, of course) in your Windows Control Panel. It ain't brain surgery, but it's not something we enjoy

doing, either. Also, even though the R100 looks to have proportional rudders on either side of it, the reality is that they are the plain ol' "on" or "off" sort, just like the other two buttons on the wheel's face, rendering them useless as an analog throttle and brake system for those that don't like bothering with pedals.

For the price, the R100 is a good value if you're on a seriously tight budget. But when you consider that you can purchase the wonderful and attractive Act Labs RS for \$69, saving up for another week or two probably isn't such a bad idea.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Very comfortable to hold; great low price; good basic design.

LOWS Lacks driver software; lacks proper proportional rudders so you can't use them for braking or an analog throttle.

BOTTOM LINE Go for the R100 system if you're a die-hard racing fan on a strict budget — but only after you understand its limitations.

COMPANY

Saitek,
(310) 212-5412,
www.saitek.com

PRICE

\$49.99 (M.S.R.P.)

OTHER OPTIONS

As mentioned in the review, Act Labs makes one of the best non-force feedback wheels around — head on over to www.act-lab.com and take a look at the RS wheel has to offer.

AUREAL

SQ 1500 and 2500

COMPANY

Aureal,
(888) 345-7633,
www.aureal.com

PRICE

\$69 and \$99, respectively
(M.S.R.P.)

OTHER OPTIONS

Looking for another cool line of sound cards so you can compare features? If so, check out Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Live! cards at www.soundblaster.com. Or, just look at our review of the two newest Live! cards below!

In an interesting twist of fate, Aureal has begun selling its own line of sound cards instead of relying on companies like Diamond and Turtle Beach to evangelize its technology for it. Coming in two different flavors, the SQ 1500 and SQ 2500, these two new cards are very similar

to their O.E.M. brothers with a few important differences.

The SQ 1500, while roughly comparable to Vortex 1-based cards (the actual chip was known as the 8820), differs from cards like the Turtle Beach Montego A3D in that it uses a slightly different, less powerful, 8810 processor. Because of this, a lot of the A3D 1.0, DirectSound, and DirectSound3D effects it accelerates are mostly done in software (i.e. by your CPU). Other than that, though, the SQ 1500 actually offers a couple of very nice features never before seen in a Vortex 1

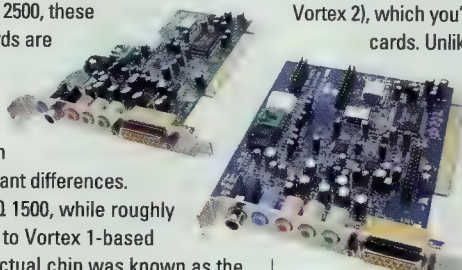
card, such as a digital S/PDIF out for connecting to a digital receiver or digital speakers, and the ability to drive two or four speakers for surround sound setups.

The SQ 2500 on the other hand, uses an improved version of the 8830 chip (a.k.a. Vortex 2), which you'll only find with Aureal cards. Unlike regular 8830s, this

new one allows the SQ 2500 to do even more work in hardware — including better, more precise Aureal Wavetracing (which examines the geometry of a virtual world

and tracks reflections and occlusions as sounds travel through space). Like the SQ 1500, this card also comes equipped with a digital out. Unlike the SQ 1500, the 2500 can accelerate A3D 1.0 and 2.0, as well as DirectSound and DirectSound 3D.

Though we tend to prefer the Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live! line of cards, there's still a great deal to like about



Aureal's offerings. It comes down to a matter of taste, really. While A3D is all about creating realistic room and environment effects, EAX (the surround sound standard employed by SBLive! Cards) is much more about letting the game designers themselves create the soundstage they want for the environments in their games. As a result, many EAX-based games have a much wetter (more reverb) sound and tend to be more dramatic in their effects. Which card should you go for? SBLive! or Aureal? Look at the games you like and see which API (EAX or A3D) is more heavily supported and choose accordingly.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS It's nice to have the creators of the core technology making their own cards; digital outs; four-speaker support.

LOWS There's not much new here if you've already got a card like the Turtle Beach Quadzilla.

BOTTOM LINE If you're looking for an A3D sound card, these are the two you're going to want to check out.

SOUNDBLASTER

Live! MP3+ and X-Gamer

COMPANY

Creative Labs,
(800) 998-1000,
www.soundblaster.com

PRICE

\$99 (M.S.R.P.)

OTHER OPTIONS

Looking for another cool line of sound cards so you can compare features? If so, check out Aureal's cards at www.aureal.com. Or, just look at our review of the two newest Aureal cards above!

Can Creative Labs do no wrong? Well, yeah, they can, but they've yet to do so with their excellent line of Sound Blaster Live! sound cards. Though the core technology hasn't changed a bit since the first Live! card went on sale back in 1998, Creative has continued to offer ever better drivers and features that continually push the Live! line to the top of the list.

With the release of the SBLive! MP3+ and X-Gamer packages, Creative has finally made a small, yet important hardware update to its Value line. Both the MP3+ and X-Gamer are identical to the Value in every way but one — each comes with digital out connections. This fact might not seem important to you at first glance (especially if you're using analog speakers), but when you hear the difference that digital makes when running on a nice set of digital

speakers, you'll be singing a different tune.

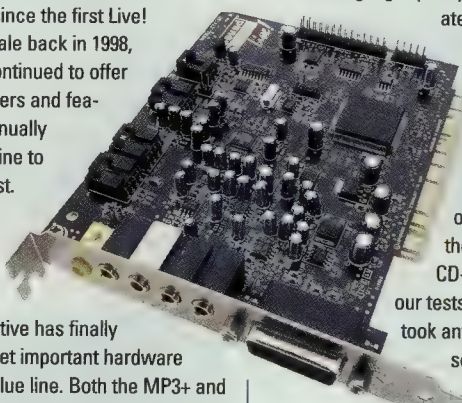
The only difference between these two "kits" is their software bundle. As its name implies, the MP3+ includes software for creating high-quality MP3 files. We created many such files

in a snap with this handy software.

The speed of encoding is entirely dependent on the power of your system and the speed of your CD-ROM recorder. In our tests, a 34MB song file

took anywhere from 45 seconds to several minutes depending on

the PC. As an added benefit, Creative's Digital Audio Center can also convert MP3 files to WAV files. This is great news because once in WAV form, tracks can be burned onto a CD and played on standard CD players.



The X-Gamer comes with a "light" version of Creative's Digital Audio Center that isn't nearly as robust, and only creates relatively low-quality MP3 files. But that's not the reason you're buying this version of the card, anyway — you want the games it comes with: full versions of *Descent 3*, *Need for Speed 4*, *Thief*, and demo versions of *Myth 2* and *Aliens vs. Predator*. Other than the software mentioned, both cards come with a huge suite of additional programs ranging from speech recognition software to SoftKaraoke. Either way you go, we're quite sure that you'll be very happy with your purchase.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS SBLive! Value with a digital out; accelerates DirectSound, DirectSound 3D, A3D 1.0 and EAX 1.0 and 2.0; comes with great software bundles.

LOWS S/PDIF-out requires mini-stereo to RCA cable to attach to most digital speakers.

BOTTOM LINE Both of the new SBLive!s are fantastic, and both receive our highest recommendations.



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Subwoofer System
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AMD 751 Irontage Motherboard w/5 PCI Slots
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Aureal Vortex II Super-Qaud Sound Card
Klipsch 4.1 ProMedia v.2-400 THX
400-Watt Subwoofer/Speaker System
Pioneer 10X/40X DVD Player
HP 9100i CDR-W CD-Writer 34/4/32X
ATX Full-Tower Case w/300 Watt PS
Microsoft Internet Keyboard PS/2
Microsoft Intellimouse PS/2
US Robotics V.90 56K Voice/Fax/Modem
Microsoft Sidewinder Precision Pro
Microsoft Windows® 98 SE OS
Free installation & configuration of
favorite games & optional drivers

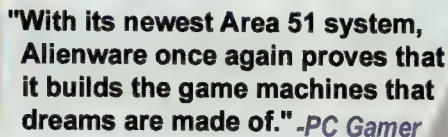
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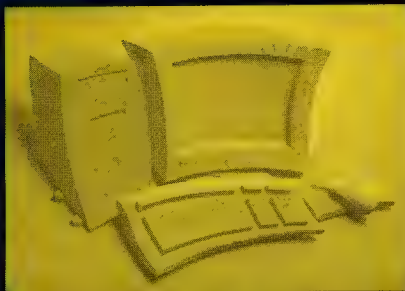
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Everybody wants a fast gaming computer, but what are you supposed to do if money is tight — or, on the flip side, if you've got money to burn? Are you supposed to go to your local computer super store and buy, of all things, a retail machine? Heck no! Each month the Trinity Page will list the parts we recommend for low, mid, and high-end budgets. Most of the prices printed here are from various Internet resellers, and at press time, are the best deals around. Depending on when and where you shop, you may find these items for a bit more, or, if you're lucky, a bit less.

WELCOME TO A BRAVE NEW WORLD

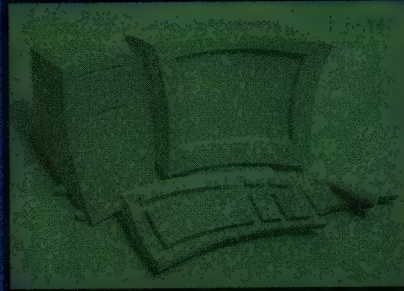


ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY \$999

CASE: Addtronics 6890A	\$100
PROCESSOR: Intel Celeron 500MHz	
PPGA	\$128
MOTHERBOARD: A-Bit BEG	\$108
MEMORY: 64MB PC-100 SDRAM	\$62
PPGA (SOCKET 370) CONVERTER: AB-RS370	\$15
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Hi-Val 6X Pioneer DVD-ROM drive w/software DVD decoding	\$115
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	\$8
HARD DRIVE: 5.4GB Seagate ST36421A	\$86
SOUND CARD: Creative SBLive! Value	\$43
MODEM: Diamond SupraMax 56k PCI	\$18
MONITOR: 17" Optiquest Q71	\$175
VIDEO CARD: 3dfx Voodoo3 3000	\$107
JOYSTICK: Logitech WingMan Digital	\$17
GAMEPAD: The original Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad	\$23
SPEAKERS: Labtech LCS 2414	\$35
KEYBOARD: Addtronics	\$15
USB MOUSE: Logitech or Microsoft	\$39

TOTAL: \$1,094

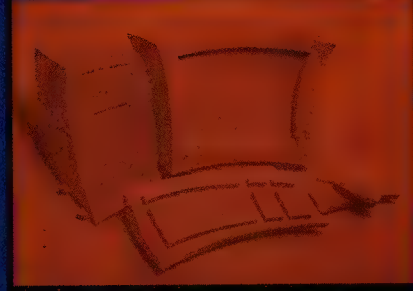


MID-RANGE SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY \$1,800

CASE: Addtronics 6890A	\$100
PROCESSOR: Intel Pentium III 600MHz or AMD Athlon 600MHz	\$422 \$393
MOTHERBOARD: For PIII or Athlon	\$108 \$133
For Athlon: FIC SD-11	
MEMORY: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM	\$138
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Creative Encore 6x with Dxr3	\$141
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	\$8
HARD DRIVE: 13.5GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm Ultra 66 EIDE	\$130
SOUND CARD: CL SBLive! MP3+	\$73
MODEM: Diamond SupraMax 56k PCI	\$18
MONITOR: 19" Optiquest V95	\$338
VIDEO CARD: Creative Labs 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra	\$148
JOYSTICK: Microsoft Sidewinder Precision Pro	\$53
GAMEPAD: The original Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad	\$23
SPEAKERS: Cambridge SoundWorks FPS 1000	\$70
KEYBOARD: Addtronics	\$15
USB MOUSE: Logitech or Microsoft USB	\$39

TOTALS: Intel PIII-based: \$1,824
AMD Athlon-based: \$1,820



HIGH-END SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY \$3,000 AND UP

CASE: Addtronics 6890A	\$100
PROCESSOR: Intel Pentium III 733MHz or AMD Athlon 700MHz	\$799 \$653
MOTHERBOARD: i820 board	\$125
For Athlon: FIC SD-11	\$133
MEMORY: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM	\$133
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Pioneer HDVD10AS-00R1 10X DVD-ROM with MPG2 card	\$259
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	\$8
HARD DRIVE: 22GXP IBM Deskstar 7200rpm Ultra 66 EIDE	\$222
SOUND CARD: CL SBLive! MP3+	\$73
MODEM: 3COM #5685 56K v.90	\$85
MONITOR: 19" Optiquest V95	\$338
VIDEO CARD: NVIDIA GeForce 256-based card: Creative Labs Annihilator	\$208
ADD-ON 3D: 12MB 3dfx Voodoo2	\$70
JOYSTICK: Saitek X36 Flight Control System	\$96
GAMEPAD: The original Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad	\$23
SPEAKERS: Klipsch ProMedia v.2-400	\$249
KEYBOARD: Microsoft Natural Pro	\$75
USB MOUSE: Original IntelliMouse with IntelliEye technology	\$55

TOTALS: Intel PIII-based: \$2,843
AMD Athlon-based: \$2,780

Just when you thought it was safe to install a new mouse...

Dear Greg, nearly gone and totally forgotten, is still alive! As reported last month, one Dear Greg question will appear each month HS Tech Q&A is two pages or longer, so keep those Dear Greg questions coming! Oh, and go ahead and send regular questions, too.



New Jaz drives are faster and hold 2GB instead of one.

Q I have a question concerning Iomega's Ditto and Jaz drives. Can I run programs from them like I would a normal hard drive?

—STEVE, VIA THE INTERNET

A If you connect a Jaz drive to your PC using a SCSI adapter, you could run programs directly from it since it's actually a bit faster than some older hard drives. The PCI SCSI card will give the best performance, and it's the optimal choice. The ISA SCSI card should still work in a pinch, too. Whatever you do, though, don't use the parallel port adapter. It's much too slow to be used for anything other than data retrieval. As for the Ditto drive, it's strictly for back-ups and is too slow to run programs directly.

NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to:

Greg Vederman,
Hard Stuff, PC Gamer,
150 North Hill Drive,
Brisbane, CA 94005

or E-mail:

gvederman@pcgamer.com

Q My computer frequently locks up and crashes excessively in all of the following ways: blue screen of death, random restarting of computer, frozen image with looping sound, frozen image without sound, frozen image with mouse cursor still able to move, Windows error in combo with one of the last two scenarios, etc. There are also a few other things you should be aware of: My room has no ground wire, I live in a rural area, and there are three computers running in this one room alone. None of the other computers seem to have any problems except for when their motherboards burn out every couple of years. Any ideas on what's happening here?

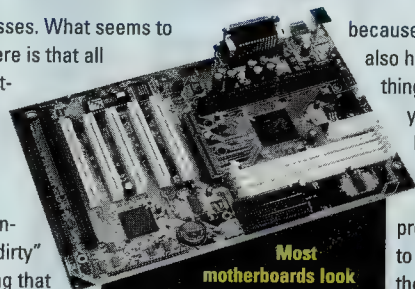
—BILLY, VIA THE INTERNET

A This is a joke, right? Well, even if it is, it serves as a good exam-

ple for the masses. What seems to be going on here is that all of your computers — not just the one you're asking about specifically — are running on very "dirty" power, meaning that you're either getting too much power or too little power to keep

things copacetic. I'm thinking that a line conditioner could probably help you greatly. Head over to www.tripplite.com for starters, and then try www.apc.com (American Power Conversion) and compare prices and specs of their respective products. My guess is that you'll no longer be frying motherboards on a regular basis in your other two computers.

As for your primary computer, it might be too late. Try formatting your drive and reinstalling Windows once you've got your new conditioner plugged in and running and see if your problems disappear. Also, make certain that your computers are getting enough cooling,



Most motherboards look nearly identical. Train yourself to look for things like the number of PCI and RAM slots.

because that could also have something to do with your problems — although you'd probably have to be living on the sun to have as many burn-outs as you've had...

Q I was truly inspired by your feature on how to build a PC. After reading it, I began to look around on the Internet for the necessary parts. As you might expect, I started with the motherboard. A short while after I began my search, it became readily apparent that there was too much information out there for me to absorb on my own; every motherboard company out there seems to make at least a dozen different boards! How in the world am I supposed to tell them apart from one another? What should I be looking for? What should I avoid? Please



This American Power Conversion power conditioner should be able to keep your systems stable.

DEAR GREG

Q First off, I'd like to say that I'm quite impressed with the things you do in *The Hard Stuff*. I think it's wonderful how people can write to you to share their emotions and ask for your comments and support. It's a great way to help out the wonderful people who read your magazine. We need more Gregs in this world!

Um, anyway, I am in the process of building a new computer and I had a couple of questions. First off, I was wondering where you found all the components for the computer you built in the December 99 issue. You found the A-Bit BE6 for \$106? I found it for \$130 — what gives? If you could tell me where you found it, the PIII, and the RAM so cheap, I would greatly appreciate it. Second, I am wondering if I will need to buy a new case for my computer when I upgrade. My existing case is from an old Pentium 120MHz and doesn't support USB. If I do need a new case, where can I find one?

—BRIAN, VIA THE INTERNET

A Listen here, you pathetic suck-up. Did you really expect your sarcasm not to show through in your writing? Did you expect me to act just like a girl who doesn't

get enough praise from her boyfriend who then sheds a tear of joy when he finally throws some compliments her way? I've got news for you; I'm not that type of girl! I'm the sort of girl who (wait, something's wrong here)... Oh, never mind. You get the idea. Just watch yourself in the future, bub.

As for where I found the components for the "Pennies on the Dollar" feature, most of them were from Internet companies

we found using pricewatch.com, though a few of them were from other companies outside of Pricewatch's service. The prices I list on the Trinity Page should not be used as a set-in-stone price guide, but

rather a way to see if you're getting a good deal or not. Generally speaking, the prices listed are the cheapest around, so chances are that the average person is going to end up spending more — especially if they shop in a retail store instead of online. In your case, the parts and prices were indeed found on pricewatch.com and unless something major happens in the industry between when I got the prices and the time you're reading these words, everything should be just about the same as they are on the Trinity Page.

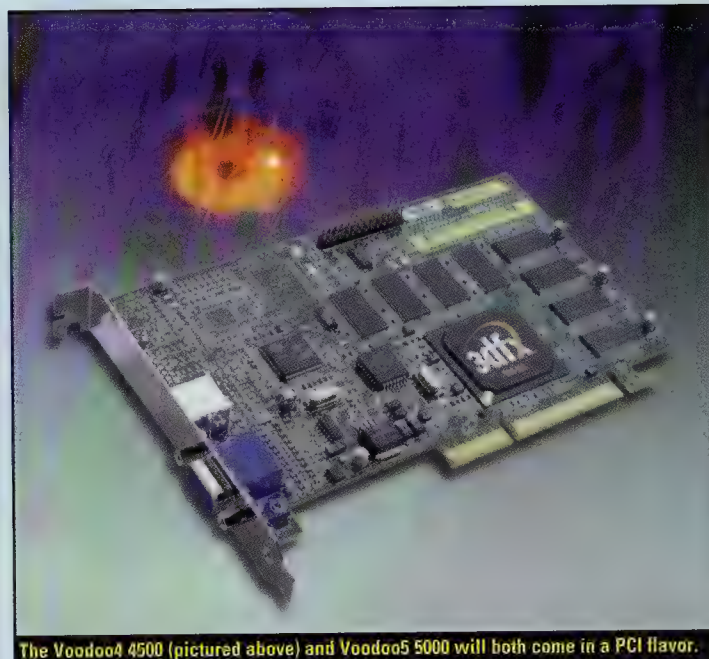
help me solve this mother (board) of a problem.

—MIKE, VIA THE INTERNET

A I feel your pain, Mike. Simply put, there are tons of different motherboards out there to choose from — so many in fact that it's almost too daunting a task to pick one in the absence of guidance from someone in the know.

What are some of the specific things you should look out for?

That's a tough one given the limited space I have here. If you want to use an Intel CPU, your best bet is a motherboard that uses either the 440BX chipset or i820 chipset. The 440BX is the older of the two, has a 100MHz front side bus (the road your system memory takes to talk to your CPU), and AGP 2X, while the i820 offers many improvements, including AGP 4X, a 133MHz front side bus, and a lack of ISA slots. Either chipset should work great depending on the other hardware



The Voodoo4 4500 (pictured above) and Voodoo5 5000 will both come in a PCI flavor.

you opt to put in your new computer. As for brands, I've always liked Asus and A-bit, but there are many other great companies out there, too. Ultimately, if you're worried, go for the motherboards we recommend on the Trinity Page, and you should be fine.

Q Back in January, I picked up an IBM Aptiva. It works fine, but the ATI Rage Pro that it came with is imbedded in the motherboard. Because of this, I recently went out and got a 3dfx Voodoo3 2000 PCI to run newer games. It works fine, but I question whether or not the video card companies are going to keep putting out fast 3D cards in a PCI format. Are they?

—NAME WITHHELD, VIA THE INTERNET

A I recently spoke to 3dfx about this very subject. To hear them tell it, 3dfx is really the only company left out there that has any plans to continue to support PCI. Other companies either don't see it as being viable any longer, or would have to spend too much money getting their made-for-AGP graphics processors working properly on PCI given the different power issues. That said, even 3dfx

doesn't plan on releasing its most powerful new accelerators in a PCI format. Because of this, you might want to think about buying a new case and motherboard down the road so you can take advantage of all the future has to offer.


Q I know there are ways of getting better performance out of a standard modem, but is there any way that I could improve the performance of my cable modem?

—ANGELA KELLER, VIA THE INTERNET

A I actually have a cable modem myself, and have tried a number of utilities out there that claim to do just that. Unfortunately, I've yet to come across any that really improved things for me. Cable modems are a lot more like routers than modems, and as such, you're much more likely to screw things up or lose your connection altogether before you ever actually speed things up. Ultimately, cable modem use in your area is the key determinant in your overall performance, and unless you can get your neighbors to stop using their modems, your speed is going to be at the mercy of their ferocious porn surfing antics.



"At Last... a Medie



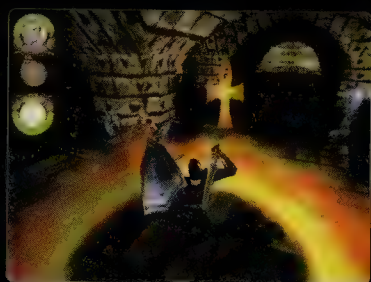
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Sawyer's Follies

When I reviewed *Rollercoaster Tycoon* several months back, only a couple minor points tempered my unabashed enthusiasm. I didn't like how unlocking mission maps was tied to completing scenario goals, and I thought a stand-alone coaster editor was needed. The *Corkscrew Follies* add-on pack has arrived with neither of these points addressed and with no scenario editor, which I found disappointing, although there's little cause for complaint about the rest of the offering.

New maps and rides are the hook in *Corkscrew Follies*, and both are plentiful. There are 30 maps, with five of them unlocked at installation. The rest must be unlocked by winning some of these first five. The scenarios are well-crafted and challenging, with innovative use of locations and plenty of diversity. Rough terrain, aging parks, a map comprised mostly of a giant bridge, and others make this an even better-crafted selection of missions than the original. I didn't get to look at all 30, but the ones I did play are quite good.

I couldn't find many

There are still a ton of rollercoaster tycoons out there, because the game continues to fly off of store shelves. Here's a guide to even more tycoon goodness.

details on exactly how many new rides and attractions are offered, but in my gaming I came across quite a few new bits. Among the new coaster types are: a wooden reverser model that lifts cars backwards up an incline and then drops them through the twists, the "Heartline Twister" which runs through giant steel hoops, older coaster types like the Virginia Reel, a steel twister, a steel wild mouse, and an odd "flying" coaster in which the person rides horizontally to give the impression of flight. There are also several new track elements.

Only one transport (suspended monorail), one water (river ride) and one thrill ride (gyro drop) have been added, but there are plenty of new gentle attractions such as flying saucers, mini-golf, cycle monorail, the ghost train, a crooked house, and the circus tent. Scenery and theme additions are also plentiful,

allowing you to create dinosaur, horror, jungle, Wild West, or abstract settings. Lots of small customization enhancements enable you to set colors for everything from umbrellas to paths, as well as create

more elaborate custom paint jobs for coasters. Coaster cars, shops, entertainers, and a sackful of minor enhancements are also onboard for a pretty thorough overhaul of an excellent game.

There is, however, a vexing issue that must be dealt with: the deliberate and quite elaborate efforts on the part of designer Chris Sawyer to prevent anyone from hacking a copy of *RCT* with *Corkscrew Follies*



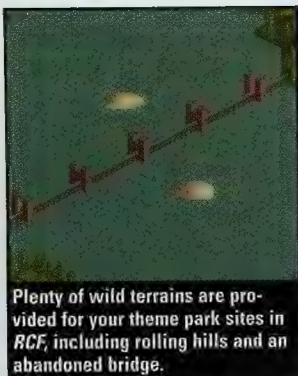
See No Evil, Hear No Evil, and Speak No Evil are three intertwining coasters synchronized for racing. Three-coaster races are new to *Corkscrew Follies*.

array of checks for money, elevation, land ownership, ride quantity, and more, stopping if it finds parameters common to user-made scenarios. This is particularly petty and quite a slap to a very loyal, hardcore base of *RCT* fans.

The issue of third-party utilities that manipulate code without using or transferring any proprietary code crops up from time to time, and the developers always come out stinking like manure. I'll say it again: trainers and editors are not illegal unless their code contains protected game code. If all a hack does is manipulate the game code, it is perfectly legal and something a developer should welcome, not expend extraordinary efforts in stopping. That the notorious daylight savings time bug (which wipes out game progress when your computer clock switches for daylight savings time twice a year) persists while time is spent on these childish attacks on the game fan is particularly galling. Thankfully, the hackers are more creative than they're given credit for, and some editors are already back up and running. Check out www.strategyplanet.com/rctuk/ and other *RCT* sites for downloads and more info. Josef



This nasty little bit of vomit induction is a heartline twister. It rockets you through hoops in a helix-type pattern so fast you're back at the start before your puke hits the ground.



Plenty of wild terrains are provided for your theme park sites in *RCF*, including rolling hills and an abandoned bridge.

Drexler also is working on a patch (which I have not tested) that counters these lockouts. Find it at <http://members.xoom.com/jdrexler/rctpatch/>.

Second Helpings

The computer version of *Axis & Allies* is a tough call. While it admirably recreates the play and feel of the classic board game — arguably one of the best “beer and peanuts” conflict games of all time — this is precisely what causes its problems as well. It’s somewhat clumsy and ugly as sin, plus it removes a central appeal of the board version: all those cool little plastic units. However, for fans of the series and devoted Internet gamers, it’s a fair low-bandwidth conflict game in the tradition of *Risk*.

Axis & Allies: Iron Blitz Edition adds a number of new twists to the original PC version while maintaining its core look and mechanics. The edition comes with two CD-

BUG PATCHES

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE v1.0.0.1 Patch (Sierra):

Mostly multiplayer enhancements including ability to run games over multiple subnets, fixed animation for using alt-fire with the pipe wrench, fixed animation for holding the Displacer in multiplayer, and AutoUpdate support added to Sierra Utilities.

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE v1.1 Patch (LucasArts):

Specifics are unknown, but this patch modifies code to improve gameplay and AI.

RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR v2.05 Patch (Red Storm Entertainment):

Numerous fixes including: *Rogue Spear* should now run under Windows 2000; added GameSpy support; the server will no longer pause until the armpatch timeout has expired while waiting for clients who have armpatches turned off; support has been added for users with multiple network connections to choose which connection to use for a multiplayer game; the blank dialog that a client received when joining a full game should now display the proper message; hitting escape during a multiplayer loading sequence will no longer cause a hang or crash; clients that disconnect during the loading sequence will no longer delay



HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE

the game start until the armpatch timeout has expired.

WHEEL OF TIME Direct3D Patch (GT Interactive):

Increases Direct3D performance on TNT2 cards.

HOMEWORLD v1.04 Patch (Sierra Studios):

Immense patch addressing lots of issues. Highlights include: checking all available CD-ROM drives for the *Homeworld* CD allowing the *Homeworld* CD to be placed in any CD-ROM drive on the system; cheat detection for multiplayer games; screensavers will no longer activate when *Homeworld* is running; added dedicated server support.

AGE OF WONDERS v1.1 Patch (Epic Games):

Another massive patch including: enhancements to AI in both World and Tactical modes; fixes to game speed; proper exit to Windows; removed sound “clicks”; Resolution-Switching now works properly; Ice Storm no longer in the Air Sphere instead of the Water Sphere; losing a Campaign scenario and replaying it no longer gives the player extra Magic Spheres; in multiplayer (Simultaneous-Turns), a host-controlled option has been added to the Scenario Setup screen; Turtle Units now have corpse graphics.

YOU’LL FIND ALL OF THESE PATCHES ON THE CD! PLUS, YOU’LL FIND OUR PATCHES ARCHIVE AT WWW.PCGAMER.COM.

ROMs: one the old, un-enhanced version, and the other the new *Iron Blitz* version. They’re both stand-alone discs, with the difference being one is, well, not as good, so the decision to include both is a bit of a stumper. Hasbro has bent itself into pretzels to spice up A&A for *Iron Blitz*, and its efforts have paid off with some genuinely

interesting features.

The big difference for loyal A&A-ers is the addition of a Marine unit capable of enhanced amphibious assaults, and a destroyer which is immune to the first strike capability of subs. Considering the delicate balance of the original game, it’s pretty impressive that two new units can have such a big impact on strategy without unbalancing gameplay. A higher degree of game customization also distinguishes *Iron Blitz*. You can pre-set country allegiances, modify starting IPCs, and edit territory ownership, occupation, and IPC value. Unit sprites have more distinct looks and an import utility allows you to create custom sprites. Finally, a number of pre-set starting situations are offered as scenarios that recreate some historical and hypothetical WWII situations. These will all be welcome enhancements to fans, but those not swayed by the rather flat original PC port aren’t given any reason to change their opinion.

A long-overdue and

heartily welcome addition to the budget shelf is *X-COM Collector’s Edition*, which contains the original game, *Terror from the Deep*, and *Apocalypse*. No doubt the offering has appeared to re-establish the brand in time for *X-COM Alliance*, but all three games hold up remarkably well and play better than most of the subsequent clones. I recently finished a rather unpleasant session with Eidos’ new *Abomination* and wasn’t all that surprised when my subsequent *X-COM UFO Defense* game trumped it in every way. Not bad for a five-year old title! A major criticism, however, is the complete lack of printed documentation, which newcomers to the series will find quite vexing. I’m not a big fan of PDF manuals, and this didn’t give me any reason to think differently. A large glossy poster of a murky alien is crammed in the box, but not a line from the original manuals. Keep the poster, folks: we’ll take the docs every time.

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X-COM UFO Defense is still a great game after all these years — it’s even better than some of the crap available on shelves right now. You’ll find the complete game and its sequels on the *X-COM Collector’s Edition* CD.

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OPINION

MULTIPLAY

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You Listen, But Do You Hear?

DM: <bzzzt, crackle> Luton? Luton, do you copy?

ML: <bzzzt> Barely. This voice tech is no good.

DM: Yeah, what's the problem here? This is the year 2000, for God's sake. In a year's time, we're supposed to have PanAm shuttle flights to the moon, according to Arthur C. Clarke. So why the hell can't game companies seem to manage a decent user-to-user voice system? They're just microphones and speakers and phone lines, right?

ML: Let's not be so quick to blame the game companies for lousy voice systems. Programmers have been doing everything in their power to eliminate the appearance of lag over crappy 28.8 connections and now we're trying to squeeze our voices in there?! What we need is a better infrastructure. Broadband will make that happen, but the captain hasn't approved us for access yet because *somebody* ran our squad car into a garbage truck about a month ago. Besides, what's so bad about typing?

DM: That garbage truck was suspected of harboring pirated games! And I let nothing stand between my swift justice and the criminal scum that infest our streets. As far as type-chat goes, nothing compares to the intensity of voice communication under fire in a multiplayer game. Let's face it: half the fun of LAN gaming is the threats and trash-talk you engage in, and I've never had more fun than I did exchanging clipped, panicky orders with squadmates in *Team Fortress Classic*. What's seriously preventing the adoption of good voice transfer in online games?

Do you really want to hear a snobbish 13-year-old give you orders or tell you to "suck it" after he's railed your ass?

voice bits. How much you take away determines the quality of the voice system. That may be an oversimplification, but that basically what's happening.

DM: So we're basically waiting around for the sprocketheads to build pipes big enough. A stakeout, so to speak.

ML: Yes. But let's consider the social ramifications for a minute. Barking out orders and trash-talking with co-workers is all good and well. Do you really want to hear a snobbish 13-year-old give you orders or tell you to "suck it" after he's railed your ass?

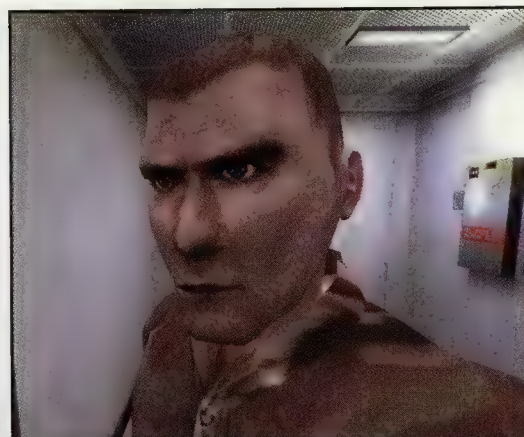
The big pipes that will allow good real-time voice technology in 3D shooters are coming. But is it something we even want?

ML: Okay, let me put it this way. Take your kitchen faucet, for example. You can turn it on full blast but you're only going to get so much water out per second. Now take a fire hose. Turn that sucker on full blast and you're going to putting out a hell of a lot more water per second! Your modem is analogous to a kitchen faucet and those little data bits are analogous to water. When you're playing a 3D shooter online, you have that sucker turned on full blast. When you call your mom on the phone Sunday evening you're using that same faucet (albeit in a slightly different way) and have it turned on about half-way. So the problem is

clearly evident. If you're already using *all* of your available bandwidth for gaming, the only way to fit voice communication in there is to take away some of the gaming bits to make room for the

DM: Hadn't really thought about that. I guess I blithely assume that the players I encounter in the currently-silent online world are as eloquent and well-behaved as myself. But now that you mention it, the constant stream of adolescent abuse one has to deal with online is probably best left out of my eardrums. Still, it would be nice to be able to exchange witty barbs with friends in other cities. More importantly, though, the *games* are simply better when they incorporate real-time voice tech. We've already seen what they can do in golf games, where you can chat about a buddy's putting yips. And there's nothing like a quick "Check the corners!" in *TFC*.

ML: You're right. It's not fair to criticize a technology just because some people will abuse it. Unlike single-player games, the online world is very much like the real world in that it's a reflection of what we, the user population, put into it. There will be annoying jerks, no doubt, but there will also be your tightly knit circle of friends that will make the game an even better place to be. At the risk of sounding like a complete geek, I consider some of those original *Quake* deathmatch levels to be old hangout spots for me and my buddies. I'll find myself saying things like, "Hey, remember when you were



This stern-looking dude from *Team Fortress 2* will feature real-time synced voice provided by a human player.

hiding under the stairs in DM6 waiting for the shotgun to respawn, and I lobbed my last grenade in there and blew you to pieces?" It's almost like we were really there. With real-time voice tech the line between our gaming life and real life will be blurred even more. Much to the chagrin of "significant others", of course.

DM: Partner, I'm only married to my job. Law enforcement is the lady of my life.

ML: Yeah, but you're a psycho cop. Why'd they have to partner me with a burnout case embittered about his last partner's death?

DM: You don't understand! Maybe if we'd had proper voice technology available, I could have heard Billy's wounded agonizing screams! Maybe I could have responded faster, or at least been there to offer consoling words as the life choked out of his convulsing body. (sniff)

ML: I'm calling the cop shrink. You're Section 117 for sure.

PCG



THE POINT AFTER

BASEBALL • BASKETBALL • FOOTBALL • HOCKEY • GOLF • SOCCER • ETC.

I Have a Dream(cast)!

Ask any sports gamer what's more important, gameplay or graphics, and you're almost guaranteed to hear the former. No one likes to think of themselves as shallow or susceptible to the mindless allure of eye-candy. The truth, however, is that many of us (and I definitely include myself here) do consider the look of the game an important aspect in the overall quality of a title. The problem only arises when we're so mesmerized by the pretty pictures that we forgive a title's gameplay inadequacies.

The reason I bring this up is that I've been puzzled by the almost across-the-board adoration I've been hearing for the two sports games — *NFL 2K* and *NBA 2K* — which have come out for Sega's new console, the Dreamcast. I will admit that, without ever having played the game, the pre-release videos I saw of the football title convinced me to blow a few hundred bucks on a Dreamcast. I will also admit, after having played both games, that they are fun to play...for a short while, anyway. But the accolades being heaped on these games is starting to make me think that all of this talk about how important gameplay is to people is merely lip service. In my mind, these two games are perfect examples of style over substance.

Now don't get me wrong — there's certainly a place in the sports genre for great-looking, heavily arcade-oriented games. I've been a big fan of EA Sports' NHL series since the beginning, and I've always been able to overlook its less than realistic take on the sport.

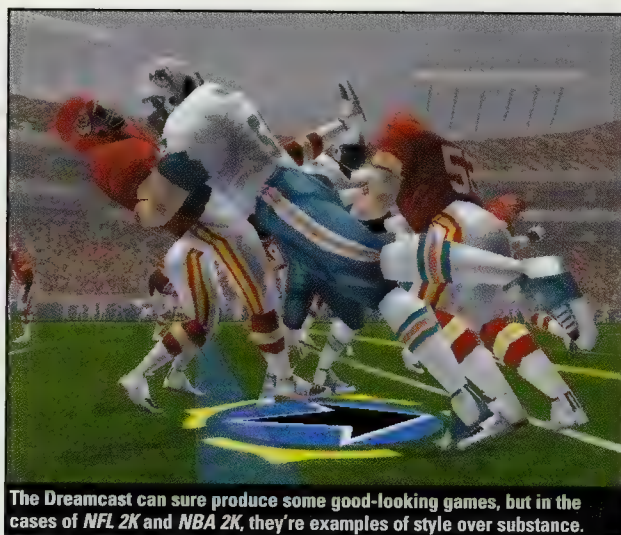
I guess the reason I'm bothered so much is that a vast majority of the reviews I've seen for *NFL 2K* and *NBA 2K* actually state that they are the most realistic portrayals of the sport ever created. Okay, visually maybe, but it took me, at most, two games of each to realize that these games weren't what I was looking for. For instance, the running

Thinking about buying a Dreamcast? Those pretty graphics sure are tempting. Well, before you do, check out Smoke's take on Sega's two highly touted sports titles.

game in *NFL 2K* is one of the worst I've seen in a football game. If you don't believe me, just run a game with the computer controlling both teams. If you're lucky, one of the teams will finish the game with positive rushing yardage. This translates into you being able to stop your opponent's running game at will, regardless of your defensive play-calling. The opposite is true, too — it's nearly impossible to sustain a rushing attack regardless of your team (all of these comments apply to the two higher difficulty settings). Oh, you'll eventually learn a few tricks that will make things a little easier, but it's never very satisfying.

NBA 2K has a lot going for it as an arcade game, but when I read the many reviews that touted it as the closest thing to the real thing, I just have to shake my head. Within a few quarters, I was able to beat the computer's defense on a fairly regular basis, even at the game's highest skill level. So much for "It's thinking"!

Ironically (and the part that boggles my mind the most), a lot of these reviewers compare the game to the PC's latest *NBA Live* game, and claim a knockout victory in the Dreamcast's favor. These are some of the same people that have taken *Live* to task in the past for its somewhat porous defense. Well, I'm here to tell you that *NBA 2K* plays defense just as badly as the earliest incarnations of the *Live* series...it just looks a hell of a lot better while it fumbles. For my money, no basketball game plays as well as *NBA Live 2000* on the court. Add the incredibly fun franchise mode and the wealth of extras, and from where I sit, the knockout is on the other chin. The same goes for *NFL 2K* versus *Madden 2000* on



The Dreamcast can sure produce some good-looking games, but in the cases of *NFL 2K* and *NBA 2K*, they're examples of style over substance.

the PC; to me, it's no contest.

My goal here is not to put down the people that like these games. I just want any PC gamers who may be considering buying a Dreamcast for these two games (or those that already own the system and can't understand what all the hype was about) to know that there are opposing opinions out there.

In Other News...

Speaking of *NBA Live*, I recently had a chance to chat with Josh Holmes, the assistant producer. Our conversation covered ways to improve what is already an outstanding game, and he shared some of the features the team has planned for next year. I can't go into any specifics, but if half of what we discussed is implemented (and the impression I got is that it will, and then some), you're going to want to reserve your copy of *NBA Live 2001* immediately.

While visiting 3DO (the Team .366 name is no more) for this month's preview of

High Heat 2001, I gave Mark Dickenson a chance to redeem himself for his woeful 17-strikeout performance against me at last year's E3. Same match-up — Mark's Phillies had Curt Schilling on the mound, while I chose Al Leiter to pitch my Mets to victory. Mark jumped to an early 1-0 lead when he homered off a rare mistake pitch; the strikeouts were coming fast and furious, though. By the eighth I had pulled ahead by a score of 2-1, and I decided to pinch-hit for Leiter and let Armando Benitez and his 100mph fastball finish things out. Leiter deserved the respite — the man had just racked up an incredible 20 strikeouts in his eight innings of work! As (bad) luck would have it, the alpha version of the game we were using picked this crucial time to crap out on us. Mark claims the game doesn't count because it was never completed. I like to think of it more along the lines of a rainout. Regardless, I thought you might like to know.

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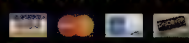
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COLIN WILLIAMSON

OPINION

THE KILLING BOX

3D ACTION GAMING MODS DEATHMATCHING CLANS TRENDS

Feelin' the Love

Remember how your mom would treat you and your siblings with the same amount of love? Even though you got suspended from school for launching spitwads at Mrs. Helm when her back was turned, Mom would bake you cookies and adore you just as much as she did your older brother, who pulled straight As and did community service at the old folks' home every Tuesday and Thursday? That's the way I've been feeling about the games I review lately.

Sure, I'll shake my head in dismay at a *HeadGames* title, but I'll also go out of my way to note any special innovations or good ideas that the game has to offer. Like my mom always used to tell me, we all have something special to donate to the world, no matter how insignificant that contribution may seem. None of us are as smart as all of us. Since here in Japan I'm still waiting for my copies of *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament*, I'd like to make an example of each game's individuality by talking about three frequently neglected 3D shooters.

Tekwar

The Pitch: Take the world-famous BUILD engine used in *Duke Nukem 3D*. Now add the *Tekwar* universe, straight from the novels "written" by William Shatner himself.

Could the end result be something even more entertaining than the "Tekwar" TV series on UPN? Yes indeed!

Contributions to the Genre: As far as I can remember, *Tekwar* was the first 3D shooter with digitized characters. This was a big thing way back in the mid-nineties, and gave programmers and their friends the opportunity to dress up in funny outfits and screw around in front of a makeshift bluescreen for a couple days. *Tekwar* also opened up the world of celebrity "authors" to computer gaming. If Bill Shatner's books had the clout to spawn an interactive ver-

Like a benevolent parent who can't bear to see her children unhappy, Colin doles out props to some games that aren't traditionally thought of as, well, tolerable...

sion, perhaps someday we'll get to play a high-seas swashbuckler based on Fabio's best-selling *Rogue!*

The Fatal Flaw: The digitized characters looked like blobby mutants. Capstone would have gotten better results by giving a high school art student a copy of MacPaint and a KoalaPad.

However, we can forgive this 'cause Shatner's a character in the game. In fact, all games that we review automatically get 10-point deductions if William Shatner is not somehow involved. Hell, *Tetris* would have united the world by now if Captain Kirk had been hamming it up in FMV cutscenes.

Chex Quest

The Pitch: There's only one thing I enjoy more than playing *Doom* — and that's enjoying the fun, crunchy taste of Chex! I figured someone had slipped some hallucinogens into my morning OJ when I found a *Chex Quest* CD-ROM packed into my cereal box. Think you've played all of the licensed *Doom*-engine games? Think again, Sparky!

I swear I am not making this up. It's just like *Doom*, except the Deimos Moon Base is now the Chex Research Facility, and all the satanic stuff has gotten the axe. There's not much real violence, either — don't expect the bad guys to explode into bloody chunks of Chex Party Mix.

Yet *Chex Quest* was such a hit with breakfast cereal fans that it spawned the sequel *Chex Quest II*, which also utilized the *Doom* engine. Rumor has it that Ralston-Purina is looking into licensing the *Quake III* engine for *Chex Quest Arena*, where

Chex-shaped warriors duke it out for honor, glory, and the dietary fiber required to maintain regularity.

It probably goes without saying that this is the weirdest id engine license ever, if you don't count *Wisdom Tree's Super Noah's Ark 3D* (it's a carbon copy of *Wolfenstein 3D* with a biblical makeover).

Contributions to the Genre: What, I've gotta spell this out for you?

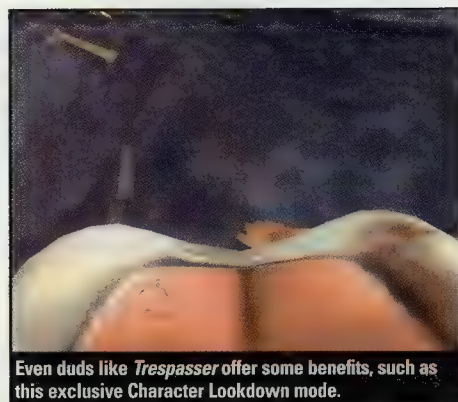
Chex Quest is the most revolutionary breakfast cereal promotion ever, or at least since the time you could trade in three dozen *Trix* UPC symbols for a Nintendo Power Glove.

The Fatal Flaw: None. *Chex Quest* rocks. And it's part of a fully balanced breakfast!

Trespasser

Even though I bash this game on a nearly daily basis, I've still got a soft spot for it — the same soft spot that makes me go see Steven Seagal movies. Come on! You've gotta love anyone with the rocks to release a game with the minimum system requirements of a Silicon Graphics Infinite Reality. Featuring the revolutionary WackyPhysics™ engine, *Trespasser* is a game about human frailty, the dangers of scientific progress, and suppressing the urge to sledgehammer your CPU after unsuccessfully trying to stack crates for three hours. This one belongs in everyone's library.

Contributions to the Genre: Breasts. When you got tired of stacking crates, all you had to do was look down and you were rewarded with a large, 3D-rendered pair of mam-



Even duds like *Trespasser* offer some benefits, such as this exclusive Character Lookdown mode.

maries. Most players found it more entertaining to stare at your character's cleavage than to find keycards and throw rocks at velociraptors. I spent a good few hours attempting to get the game's "twisty arm" interface to grope myself. Unsuccessfully, alas.

The Fatal Flaw: While *Tekwar* had the Power of Shatner, *Trespasser* has the Curse of Minnie Driver. After accomplishing a major gameplay goal, Minnie's voice comes on and starts babbling about stupid stuff, like riding the bus to work and fishing for trout off the coast of Pago Pago. We all know that Minnie should be asking herself questions like "Why can't I aim any of these damn guns straight?" or "Why is the scenery warping around me like I'm in a Kubrick movie?"

So there you have it. Tune in next time for an in-depth look at the final revisions of *Quake III Arena* and *Unreal Tournament*, when *The Killing Box* dares to ask the question: does plain-vanilla Deathmatch cut it any more in the days of *Team Fortress* and *Tribes*...or is mowing the lawn a more interesting prospect? Find out next month!

PCG



ALTERNATE LIVES

ADVENTURE AND ROLEPLAYING GAMES NEWS TRENDS

Sacrifice Humanity, Maximize Play

So, here we are in the February issue, which you're probably reading around the middle of January. That means that all the holiday madness is over, and all the gaming gifts you received are glistening like dumplings (Eh? — Ed.) on your shelf. However, most of those are roleplaying games that take ages to finish, and with the family visiting, food to eat, and pretending to enjoy the hair-crimping kit your Aunt Vera bought for you, it's likely that time simply hasn't been on your side. Therefore, I'd like to step away from my normal tack of postulating seriously on the state of adventure and roleplaying gaming (especially since we've already got a lovely roleplaying feature from Tom McDonald in this issue), and instead give you some tips on how to maximize play time so that you can finally reach the Core in *Septerra Core*, or fix all the shrines (if not the bugs) in *Ultima IX: Ascension*.

First of all, a lot depends on whether you're still in school or a valued member of the nation's workforce. If you're currently a student, your job is immeasurably more difficult — while work brings in money, school makes far more demands on your time, what with the homework and

Now that us RPG fans finally have all the games we've ever dreamed of, what antisocial tactics can we employ to find time to play them?

all. Unfortunately, you can't just blow off your education — otherwise you'll have to pay for new games and hardware with a job at Burger King, which means only one new game a month.

The first order of business in such a case is two-fold — first, immediately sever all contacts with friends who demand social interaction outside of the school campus. You can always make new friends in May and June, when game releases die down to a trickle.

Second, take a little time to investigate the actions of the smartest person in school — unless you're that person (and let's be honest here), chances are they have some serious, deep, dark secrets that they would do anything to keep silent. Discover them, and then use them to your advantage — in order words, get them to do your homework for you, so gaming can begin promptly when you arrive home from class. You'll more than recoup the time lost unearthing your blackmail

material. Sure, it's completely unlike the Avatar's actions, but you only need to think like the Avatar when you're adventuring in Britannia.

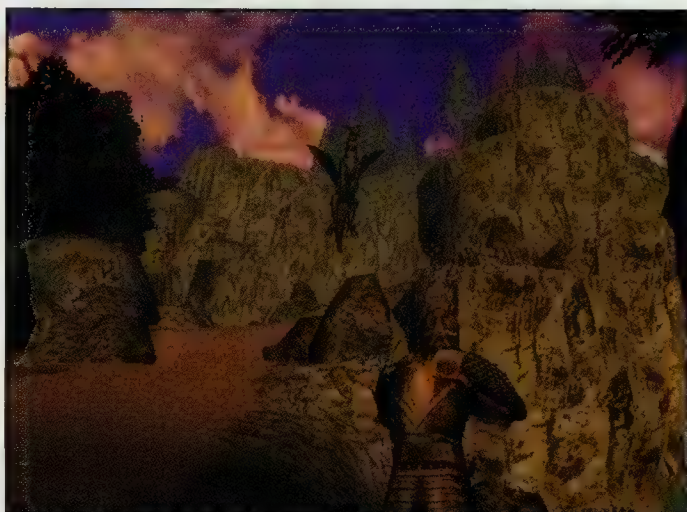
If you're a working stiff, however, it's really pretty easy to work around dedicating much more time than necessary to the office. Besides, most places have an Internet connection, thus allowing easy access to hints and tips during 15 minute breaks. Also, I suggest working extra hours during the summer (once again during those long periods of dry spells for game releases), and taking your vacation shortly after Christmas. Take a Friday off here, a Monday off there — the three-day weekends will provide lots of prime game time.

No matter how you spend your daytime hours, however, the time to play is in the evening. First of all, invest in a decent chair — if you have to get up every ten minutes to walk off your backache, you'll never solve the mysteries facing Gabriel Knight. Since everyone needs beverages and assorted nourishing materials — I suggest caffeinated beverages and a steady supply of beef jerky (protein), sunflower seeds (Vitamin E), and white bread (grains and starch) — try to situate your computer setup near the refrigerator. Of course, the best compromise of both chair and food/beverage access is available directly from LA-Z-BOY: The "Oasis" reclining chair has a built-in thermoelectric refrigeration unit that stores six 12-ounce cans. It also has a built-in telephone that will easily let you plug in your modem for online access, and the 10-motor massage and heating system will keep you in the lap of luxury as you solve the woes of Lord British.

The biggest opponent of prime RPG play, however, is the dread specter of sleep. That insistent natural urge that forces you into nightly oblivion is the ever-present nemesis of gamers everywhere, and should be avoided at all costs. While strong chemicals (stronger than caffeine, I mean) can help fight the need to close your eyes, it can affect your gameplay to such a point that it becomes more of a hindrance than a help — especially if you reload your game the next day and discover that your entire party is only wearing tunics and wielding candles into battle. My preference is to simply play until I feel a sharp pain in my forehead — usually my face striking the keyboard. Then I get up as early as possible to get to work, so I can get home earlier. Sure, only getting three hours of sleep a night might make you grumpy, but ostracizing anyone who might make social demands on you simply makes it easier to avoid any external obligations. Besides, you can always rebuild relationships during the summer slump when you get plenty of sleep and waste away the time to the next RPG release by posting inflammatory comments on *comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.rpg*.

If planned accordingly, the months of January through April can be filled to the brim with incredible adventures in lands far away. All it takes is a bit of insensitivity to your fellow man, the willingness to push your body to the extreme, and the realization that you'll probably be ten to twenty pounds heavier by the time Spring rolls around. And as any dedicated gamer knows, that's a small price to pay for three solid months of Gaming Goodness™.

PCG



Can't find the time to play the hot new holiday roleplaying titles like *Ultima IX: Ascension*? Use our handy suggestions to help you maximize your play potential.

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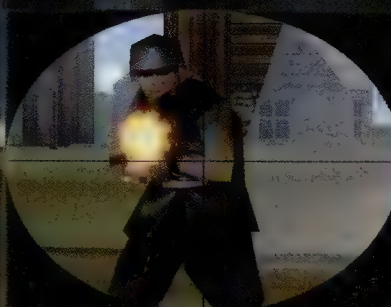
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WILLIAM R. TROTTER

OPINION

THE DESKTOP GENERAL

WARGAMES HISTORIC AND MILITARY SIMULATIONS TACTICAL COMBAT

"Bottom Line: Wargames Suck!"

By the time you read these words, the question of whether or not the world ends on December 31st will definitely have been answered. My original intent for this column was to salute the very persistence of wargames by writing my first impressions of *Combat Mission* (a 3D tactical game whose demos, posted at www.battlefront.com, have generated great interest among the faithful) and *Smolensk '41*, the first John Tiller game to be published by HPS. But the former has been delayed until mid-December and the latter arrived too close to deadline for me to take more than a cursory look. Both games deserve more than "cursory," so that particular column will just have to wait until early 2000.

But, as I was casting about for a substitute topic, I came upon an impassioned debate raging on the "wargames.historical" newsgroup. Some of the postings were silly, some obscene, and some frothing-at-the-mouth deranged. But after passing the 100-odd messages through my bullshit filters, I found issues that impinge quite sharply on the future of wargaming, and indeed on its very nature. For symbolic, if not prophetic, reasons, a summation of this debate seemed eminently suitable for the last column of the millennium (yes, I too have finally learned how to *spell* the damned word correctly).

The opening salvo was fired on November 19th by a chap who threw down the gauntlet by posting a screed entitled: "Wargames suck — bottom line!" Well, them's fightin' words on this newsgroup, and the posting was so hysterically dogmatic (and so riddled with bad spelling, grammar, and punctuation) that at first most of those who responded dismissed it as a remarkably crude example of "trolling." (For those who don't know, "trolling" is web-speak for the act of posting an intentionally outrageous

The Colonel says farewell to the "Century of Wars" by lighting his cigar with a flame-war. What better way to end the millennium than with a shouting match?

message for the purpose of stirring up a flame-war.)

But as the flames began to rise, it seemed at least possible that this guy was for real. And even if he was only a troll, he had twisted the wargaming community's collective titty and raised issues that demand to be addressed. In this summary, I will first adumbrate the original poster's points in order and then the gist of the counter-arguments will follow.

Agree or violently disagree, you'll find the exchange provocative.

Wargames suck, and sell poorly (compared to other types of games), because, according to The Troll:

1. They appeal mostly to washed-up has-beens with outdated computers who can only run turn-based games;

2. Not one wargame has sold more than *C&C*, *StarCraft*, *Half-Life*, or *Madden 2000*;

3. If you were a developer and had the finances to create an RTS or FPS (Real-Time Strategy and First-Person Shooter) why would you even consider making a turn-based game for men over 40? "These guys won't even be buying games in ten to fifteen years, and the fact that they are that old and *still* buying games says something"...a "gray-haired audience" is a contemptible market;

4. In what war did the leaders stop and take turns? Turn-based wargames are therefore inherently unrealistic.

And now the rebuttals:

1. Most wargamers also play other kinds of games, too; they just don't make a fetish out of benchmarks and framerate. Like most gamers, they buy the best system they can afford, update it when they must, and get pissed off when they encounter a hardware/software conflict.

2. Well, no, of course no wargame has sold as many copies as *StarCraft*. And no RTS or FPS game has sold as many copies as the first *Pokemon* game. So what? Danielle Steele's books invariably sell more than Norman Mailer's. And more people buy tickets to Adam Sandler's latest flick than to a revival of *Citizen Kane*. Wargamers, somewhat like classical-music mavens, are and always have been slightly elitist in their attitude, for the simple reason that it takes demonstrably more intelligence to conjure a victory from the complexities and nuances of *Bombing the Reich* than it does to finish a level of *Quake*. This is a non-argument, typically advanced by the immature or ill-educated to claim relativistic equality with "snobs," or, as Spiro Agnew used to call them, "pointy-headed innalekshals." Bottom line: commercial success alone has absolutely nothing to do with inherent quality. Never has, never will.

3. Oh, yes! Let's spend four million dollars and waste 18 months' development time (not to mention the talents of 35 people) to release another cookie-cutter RTS game, only to watch it sink like a brick in an oversaturated market. Or, just maybe, invest 1/100th of that sum, using three to four people, and create a solid historical wargame that sells enough copies to pay the salaries of those involved with a bit of honest profit left over for beer. Which business model makes more sense? It's not a matter of "gray hair" so much as "gray matter." Blame it on MTV or the public school system or fluoride in the water, but "twitch" games offer little more than instant gratification and marketing people

have pushed that so hard, and so exclusively, that, for a while, sales projections were predicated on such vital criteria as the number of times Lara Croft's boobs oscillate per minute. The result: inbred genres that can only feed upon their own clichés.

4. "Realism"? In a typical RTS game, armies get "trained" in a barracks in mere seconds, but only one guy gets trained at a time; ports, airfields, and factories get built in 60 to 120 seconds; days and nights don't matter, nor — in most games — do supply, weather, and leadership; a commander has only to "click" and his units instantly obey — that's "realism"? A "tank rush" is not "strategy."

Here is the "bottom line": what we're talking about here is games. The very notion of real-time being *superior* to turn-based, or vice versa, is ludicrous. These are conventions, mechanisms, abstractions. Some games work best in one format, some in the other. Is chess unrealistic? A more irrelevant question does not exist.

And on a final millennial note, a lot of us old wargame farts who've been playing games for three or even four decades are not about to "age out" of our hobby; most of us are just as passionate about the games we play, if not more so, than we were when we were kids, and we have considerably more disposable income. Any game company that ignores this demographic fact does so at its own peril. So cool your jets, Troll. This whole turgid argument ("My genre's better than your genre!") is as meaningful and productive as comparing penis sizes in the locker room. And it's just about as mature.

PCG



The French Conspiracy

I have nothing against the French, but those slimy bastards are up to something. I haven't quite been able to work out all of the details of their master plan yet, but the conspiracy theorist in me suggests that it is something quite sinister. When a nation that dines on garlic-saturated snails and worships Jerry Lewis starts buying up North American computer gaming companies like they were Pokemon trading cards, then something is definitely rotten in the state of...er, the province of Burgundy.

Unless you've been gaming under a rock recently, you probably already know that a number of well-established American PC gaming companies have recently fallen victim to a wave of Gallic carpetbagging. Accolade was recently assimilated by Infogrames and Sierra succumbed to the continental charm of Paris-based software giant Havas Interactive. We didn't have a lot of time to digest these takeovers before Infogrames struck yet again and gobbled up GT Interactive. At this rate, it won't be long before we're all diving for our English/French dictionaries just to translate the readme files for our favorite games.

So what does any of this have to do with simulation enthusiasts? Well, just take a look some of the titles that are affected by this multi-billion dollar shopping spree. Since Havas took control of Sierra, three of the most respected racing simulations on the market — *NASCAR 3*, *NASCAR Legends*, and *Grand Prix Legends* — are now completely at the mercy of the Francophones. When you consider that UbiSoft's *Monaco Grand Prix 2* — arguably the best Formula One simulator currently available for the PC — also carries

Andy, ever-cognizant of creeping Gallic threats, turns his conspiracy-minded head to an analysis of the virtual takeover of the sim genre by the French.

a "Made in France" label, then it becomes abundantly clear that some smug-looking producer by the name of Jean-Pierre or Émile is now firmly behind the wheel of our most cherished driving games. Have you ever seen the way those lunatic French taxi drivers maneuver through traffic? It's time to be afraid. Very afraid.



Granted, French companies like UbiSoft have contributed some nice sims. But should they control the whole market?

But it doesn't end there. Flight sim aficionados aren't immune to these fiendish plans for global domination either. Remember Sierra's Dynamix brand and its much-anticipated *Pro Pilot 2000* and *Desert Fighters* simulation titles? With a few well-aimed strokes of a pen, Havas blew both sims right out of the sky and then proceeded to scuttle the entire Dynamix operation. Why? Clearly they're mapping out a plan to establish air superiority over the industry-leading flight sims from Jane's and MicroProse. By trimming out the strays of the herd they are simply laying the groundwork for the next stage of their hostile takeover of the entire flight sim market.

Oh, it's a complex plan all right, but those clever Frenchmen know exactly

what they're doing. Buying up companies like Accolade, Sierra, and GT Interactive gives them complete control over the ground battle being waged on the virtual race tracks around the world, so they can now start aiming their sights skyward. And their targets are the heavy-hitting combat flight simulations that they know will win the war for them.

This nefarious campaign of theirs is already well under way. At first glance, it may not seem like they've made that many inroads toward their goal of grounding the competition's fleet of combat jet sims, but that's why you have a dedicated SimColumnist like me conducting this investigation for you. I have made some interesting discoveries over the past

several weeks that only serve to validate my theory of a massive French conspiracy to wrest control of the world's computer sims. It's a multi-pronged attack that involves three key components — espionage, sabotage, and subjugation.

Curiously, their chief spy is already very well known to us. Gilman "Chopstick" Louie recently resigned his job as the chairman of MicroProse to accept a consulting position with the CIA. I'm not making this up! Old Gilman is now a spook! Why would the man who brought us the much-heralded *Falcon 4.0* give up such an impressive day job to go and practice spycraft? Simple. He's obviously a well-placed mole for the French government, and he's being paid to deliver information on all of the new flight and rac-

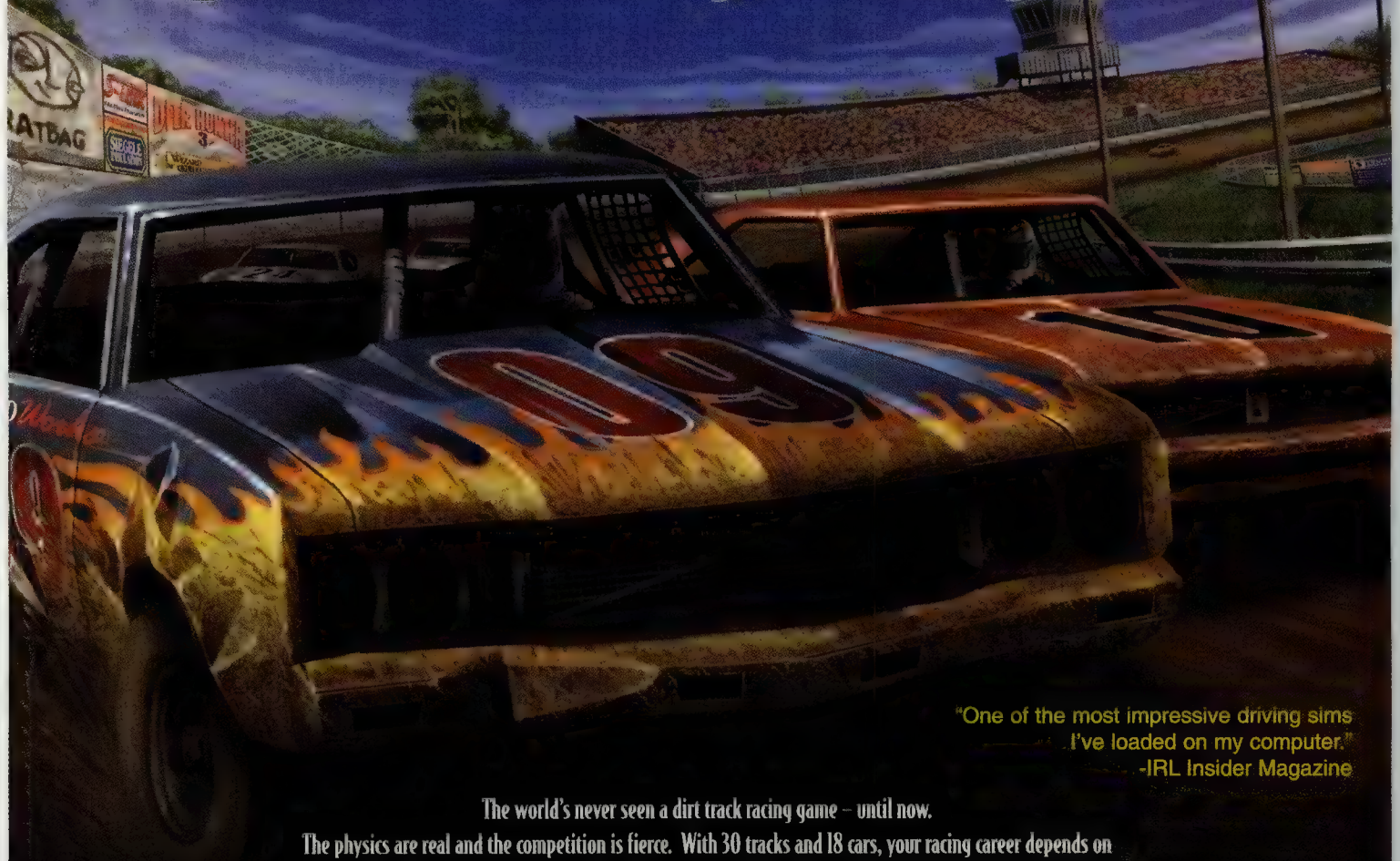
ing sims currently under development. (They probably gave him one of those cool little spy cameras too.)

The sabotage phase comes next, and you don't need to look any further than the recent takeover of Thrustmaster by French peripheral manufacturer Guillemot to see how that one's going to fly. Thrustmaster is the world's leading supplier of flightsticks, throttles, rudder pedals, and driving controllers for PC sims, and those beret-wearing Peugeot drivers are now chauffeuring this powerful enterprise. How does this help them weaken their sim publishing competition? *Man*, do I have to spell everything out for you? By attaching a harmless-looking microchip to all of their new joysticks and wheels, Guillemot can effectively destroy the fine sense of control required to enjoy titles like *MiG Alley* and *NASCAR 3* to their full potential (while at the same time improving the response of the Havas, Infogrames and Ubi Soft sims). Gamers will riot, the stock prices of competing sim publishers will plummet, and guess who's going to be there to pick up the pieces?

I for one am not going to stick around for the final sordid acquisition phase of those scheming Grey Poupon marauders. You are more than welcome to buy their upcoming Eurofighter sims and Formula Renault racing games if you wish, but I've got my stockpile of classic Jane's, SSL, MicroProse, and Papyrus titles to keep me going well into the new millennium. And if those Frenchies want them, they're going to have to come and pry them out of my cold, dead hands.

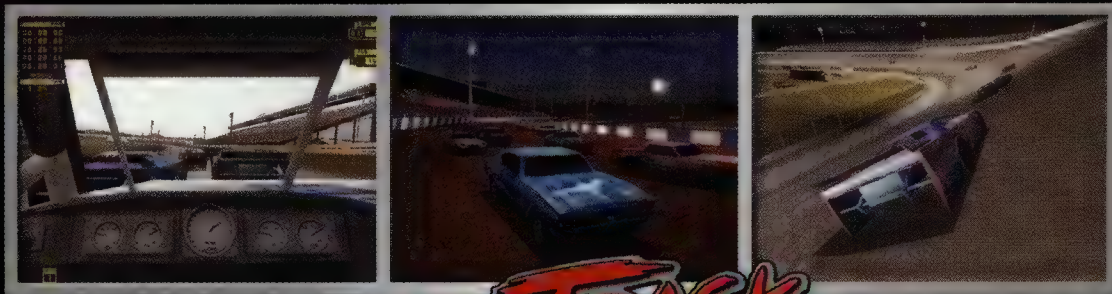
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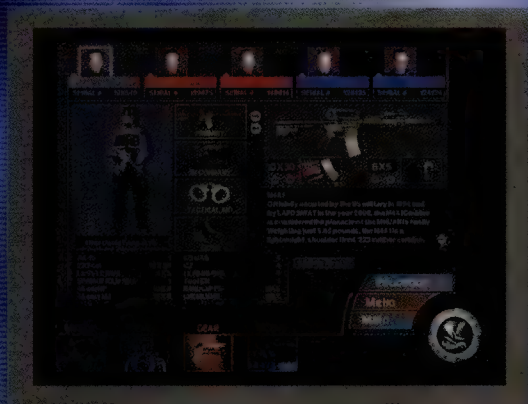
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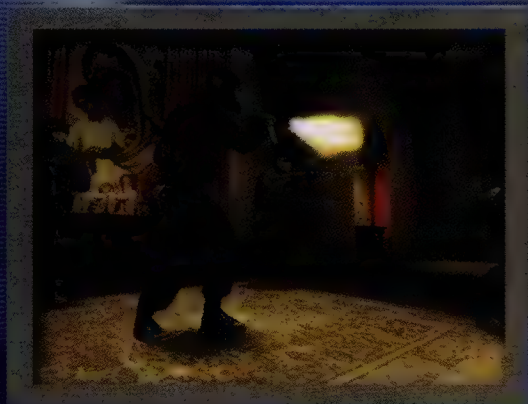


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Half-Life: Opposing Force

Half-Life was PC Gamer's Game of the Year for 1998 and was recently crowned the best game ever made — so is it any wonder that anticipation for a follow-up has been running rampant? Finally, after a long year of waiting, *Opposing Force* has arrived to sate the masses, but like the original, it can be quite a challenge even for seasoned shooter fans. Fortunately, we're on hand with a complete, step-by-step walkthrough!

Boot Camp Training

Since *Opposing Force* is an add-on, you should have already completed *Half-Life* and probably count yourself a seasoned first-person shooter player. But even so, you'll want to play through the inventive training level that Gearbox has devised. Like *Half-Life*'s super-jump ability, *Opposing Force* has a few new tricks up its sleeve. The most important new concepts are the night-vision (F key is the default), the laser sight on your Desert Eagle Pistol (alternate fire when using the pistol), and rope climbing and swinging.

Rope Climbing 101: Climbing works much like ladder climbing in *Half-Life*, but swinging takes some practice — and

in this mission you will need to swing from ropes. Remember, you can use the forward and back keys to gain momentum. The only secret is learning when to press the jump key to complete the swinging jump. Practice this skill — you may have to depend on it later.

Chapter One: Welcome to Black Mesa

- Everything that can go wrong for you and your company does go wrong; and all this before you can even land.

- After a time Shephard wakes up. He is inside a chamber with a scientist. Listen to what the scientist has to say and then begin your perilous journey through the complex.

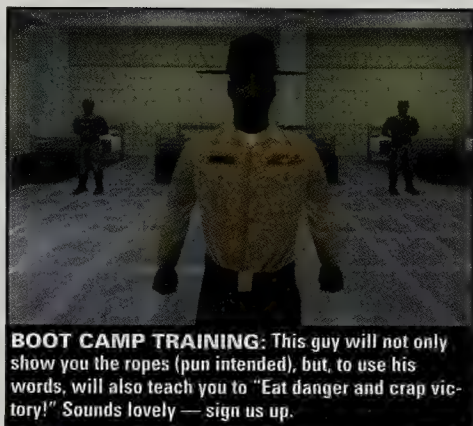
- Later in the level you'll need a power-vest to get past a guard. So, your first task is to move through the halls until you find a couple of scientists observing some soldiers who have already become head-crab victims. The vest is located in the corner of the room on some boxes.

- Head down the stairs and you should arrive in time to watch a guard take out a zombie. The guard will see your vest, ask you to help people like him escape, and then use the retina scanner to open the door. Move out!

- In a nearby room you will find a laser machine gone awry. Colorful beams will slice you in two if you touch them, but a nearby sign provides a clue of what to do. The sign says the mirrors are fragile...so go break one! Duck under the first beam (grab the wrench!) then under the second beam, and head left. Break the mirror with your handy new wrench and then move up the stairs.

- You will enter a courtyard where you will find your fallen Osprey Helicopter and several dead comrades. You can't approach because the whole area is electrified. Somehow, you have to turn off the power.

Start by heading into the nearby hanger. Enter the next courtyard where you'll find a fenced-in area containing a dead soldier and a guard. Duck into the hole on the right of the cage. Use your



BOOT CAMP TRAINING: This guy will not only show you the ropes (pun intended), but, to use his words, will also teach you to "Eat danger and crap victory!" Sounds lovely — sign us up.



WELCOME TO BLACK MESA: Listen to what the scientist says — he will give you some useful information before you start your journey.



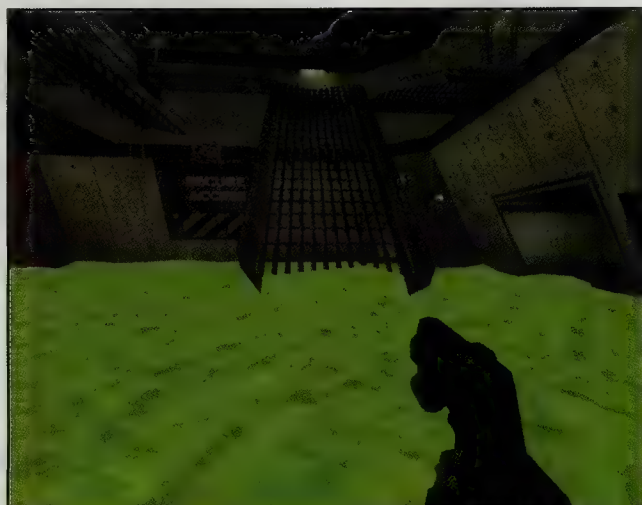
WELCOME TO BLACK MESA: The ruined Osprey is electrified — you have to figure out how to turn off the power to proceed in the level.

night-vision to navigate.

Soon you'll see a large power generator spewing electrical fire everywhere. You need to cross the room and go around the generator without getting fried. Watch the bolts — they move in patterns. When the one closest to you burns out, move forward and wait for the next one to do the same. Repeat until you get to the hole. The hole exits inside the cage.

Use the power box to turn off the juice, and then head back to the Osprey. It is safe to approach. Move toward the radio and listen to your orders. Everyone is bugging out, eh? Okay, on your left is a way down. Be sure to use the ladder.

- Enter the room filled with green toxic waste. Jump over it and head immediately to the area marked Security Clearance. You are trapped, but if you



WELCOME TO BLACK MESA: Wait until the walkway collapses, then exit this dangerous room.

remain patient you'll see quite a show and then get a chance to escape. Electricity begins arcing all over the room destroying platforms and catwalks piece by piece. After a time a ramp will fall. Jump onto it and carefully navigate the beams to the opposite door. Take the elevator down to the next room.

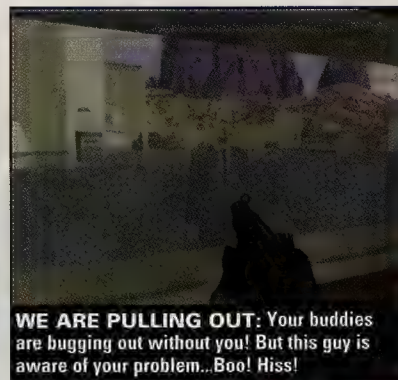
- Jump over some more waste and head to the doorway. There is a panel with conveyor controls up the stairs. Use the lever to position the platform just to the left of where you are standing. Move back down, shoot the explosive crate on the platform to clear the way, and jump up onto the boxes. Jump to the platform and move to the wall button. Press the button, jump back across, and then head into the newly revealed hallway.

- Move through the halls and down the ladder until you reach the tram. Push the cart in front of the tram and climb inside.

Chapter 2: We Are Pulling Out

- The tram will take you on a journey through the facility. As you travel, shoot the alien slaves that you pass or one of them might get a shot at you. After the tram comes to a halt, be careful — two slaves will appear behind you!

- Pass the guard who seems more



WE ARE PULLING OUT: Your buddies are bugging out without you! But this guy is aware of your problem...Boo! Hiss!

interested in the free candy than self-preservation and head up the stairs. A new monster appears behind a glass wall. It kills the guard and then grabs the scientist and teleports away, breaking the glass with its discharge. Enter the room and move to the lift. Press the button and kill the slaves at the top. Grab the fallen soldier's machine gun. Exit this room by jumping up on the boxes and into the vent above the HEV recharger.

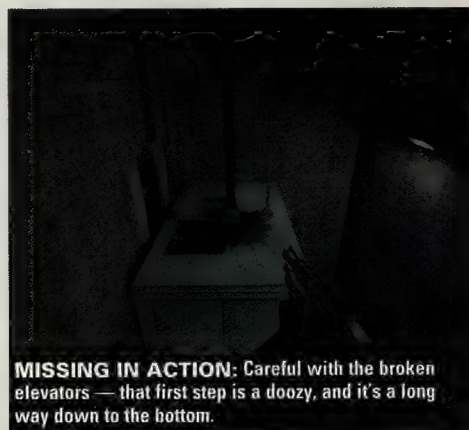
- Continue on — the path is very straightforward. Soon you will enter an area under soldier control. Move down the stairs and toward the waiting Osprey. Before you get there the door will close and you will have to watch as your team bugs out without you. G-Man, the mysterious guy in the suit, is well aware of your situation, but does nothing to help.

Chapter 3: Missing In Action

- Avoid the steam pipes and continue on until you enter the crawlspace.

- Not all of the ceiling panels can support your weight and they will drop you into a flooded room with electrified water. Climb up until you can jump your way across to solid flooring.

- Walk carefully between the two rotating fans. Continue until you reach another pair of giant fans and move toward the right one. It only has one blade. If you time it right you can jump down past the blade and into the hole (save your game first!).



MISSING IN ACTION: Careful with the broken elevators — that first step is a doozy, and it's a long way down to the bottom.



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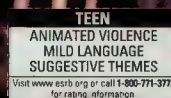
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MISSING IN ACTION: These two guys will come in very handy soon enough. Make sure they stick with you, though.

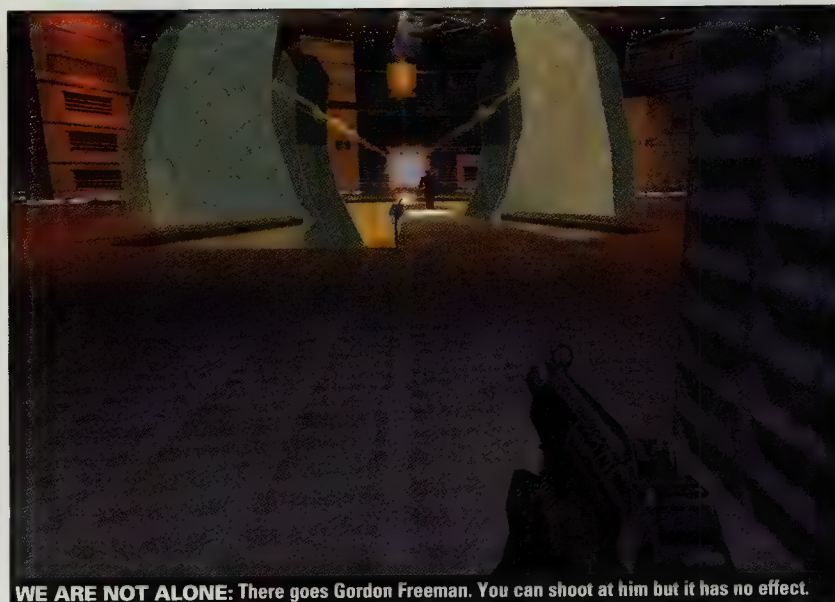
- You'll enter a room with pipes and blasting flames. Time it right and you can run and jump past the flame jets in this and the next room. Be ready to fight, though!

- After killing all the Zombies in the next room, push the box marked "Danger Explosives" into the half pipe in front of the control panel. Push the button to initiate a "test firing" and it will blow a hole in the floor for your escape.

- When you enter the elevator shaft use the ladders and walkway to make your way down to the lower car. Enter it and enter the corridor. Skid on the water, avoiding the electric cable, and go to the hallway where you can turn off the power. Head back to the shaft and jump up to the cable. Climb it to the top car and into the corridor.

- Enter the duct and it will fall. Ride it down and into the corridor. Push the box to the barricade and use it to climb over. Shoot the trip mine and go get that box again. Slide it under the vent to enter the ductwork again.

- Turn off the power and climb up. Use the radio and a couple of grunts will open the door. "Use" them and the engineer will cut through the locked door. Make sure these two follow you as you enter the elevator!



WE ARE NOT ALONE: There goes Gordon Freeman. You can shoot at him but it has no effect.



FRIENDLY FIRE: Once healed, the engineer will cut you an escape route through the blocked door.

Chapter Four: Friendly Fire

- With help from the grunts, take out all the slaves that appear in this room; it can be a tough fight. Continue on and more enemies will appear. Take them out and move through the walls that they break down.

- As you round a corner you will find a ruined bridge and a huge Alien Grunt. Shoot the explosive boxes behind him. Another Grunt will run over; take him out with your favorite weapon. Jump to the first rope, swing, jump to the second, and immediately swing to the platform. If you miss or don't jump off the second rope, you die.

- You'll enter a courtyard with a medic. Leave him alone for now. Enter the vent and listen to the Black Ops guys' conversation. Jump out and destroy them.

Don't use high explosives near that nuke, though, for obvious reasons.

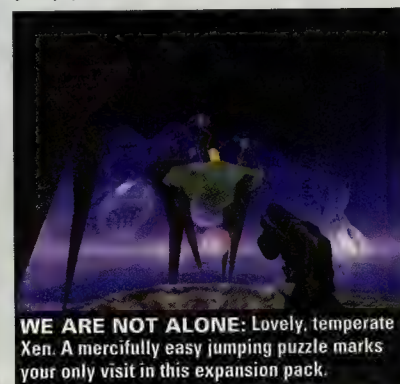
- In the next area you will find six Black Ops assassins (the nimble females). Let your men do most of the fighting. Keep fighting until you reach the stairs and the switch above. This will activate the rail cart. Head back to the rail cart and ride it in reverse to the track switch. Stop and shoot the switch, then move forward to the new track.

- Use the box and the metal drum to climb through the window and into the next chapter.

Chapter 5: We Are Not Alone

- As you move through the door you will be treated to a familiar sight — Gordon Freeman jumping through the Xen portal. If you follow him, you will die, so instead concentrate on killing the aliens warping into the room. After a time a walkway will come crashing down. Use it to jump to the teleportal.

- Welcome to Xen. This is the only Xen jumping puzzle and it isn't that bad. Jump to the nearest platform. Use the jump pad to make it to the one to the



WE ARE NOT ALONE: Lovely, temperate Xen. A mercifully easy jumping puzzle marks your only visit in this expansion pack.

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE

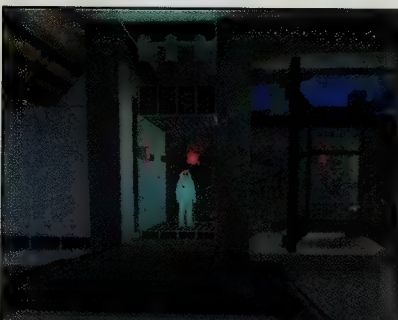
left. A scientist falls from the sky and lands here; grab his displacer gun. Keep jumping to the next logical platform until you are above a teleportal, then simply fall into it.

Chapter 6: Crush Depth

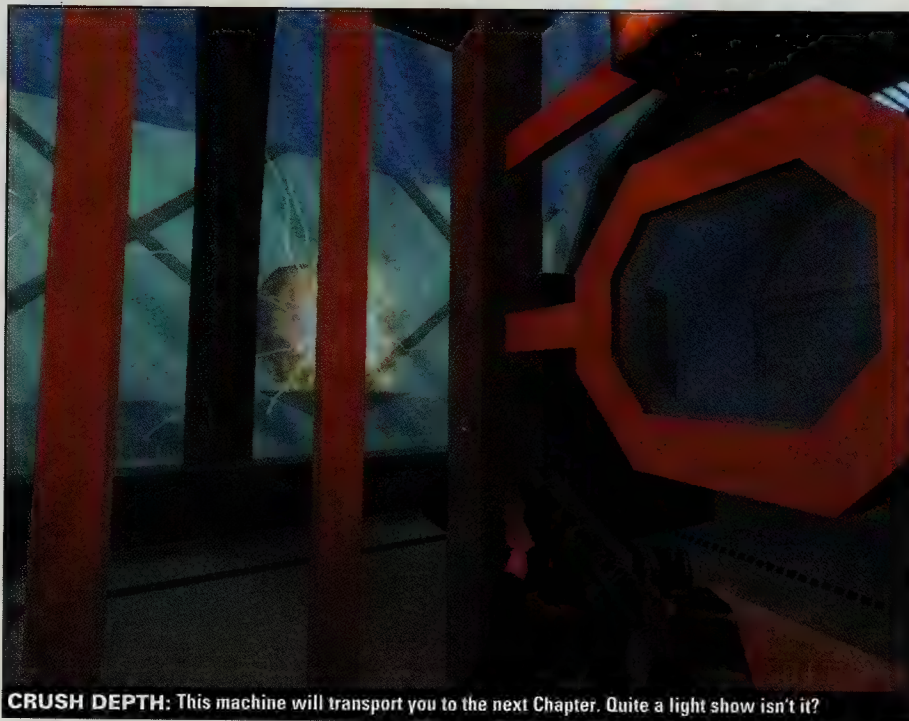
- Back in Black Mesa. Continue until you find a room with a teleportation machine. A scientist is trapped between worlds, so press the button to get him out. Have him follow you and he'll open the locked doors. The second one will fry him, which is mildly entertaining since he is useless after the first door anyway. Use the ladder in the broken tube instead, but beware the alien ambush from above.

- After the attack you will enter a drained pool. Hit the switch and ride the water up to the vent.

- The damaged medical unit will explode if you use it. Use the wheel switch to open the locked door, releasing the monster fish thing into the pool. Climb up and dive in the water (avoiding the fish, of course). Swim past it and turn the switch in the next room.



CRUSH DEPTH: You must free the scientist from his inter-dimensional prison to continue.



CRUSH DEPTH: This machine will transport you to the next Chapter. Quite a light show isn't it?



VICARIOUS REALITY: This creature is a Voltigore. It is very nasty and you really should use your best weapons against it. Sidestep when it flings its powerful energy bolt at you.

- Shoot the switch to turn off the electric barrier, move through, and kill the creatures there. Push the button and move through the door. Head for the island with the teleportal. It will take you to Xen where you'll find another portal to take you back to Mesa. Hit the switch and jump into the water with the mutant fish. Swim past them to the exit, which is a teleportation machine.

Chapter 7: Vicarious Reality

- As you run through the tunnel beware the vicious monsters that teleport in. Laying a trip mine or a detpack can dispatch these critters easily. When they die, one will explode and break a hole in the glass. Drop down and face off with a nasty new creature. Be careful — this

guy's energy attack is extremely powerful!

- In this room, which is sort of an alien research area, you can open the cages if you want a fight. You should open the Snark cages (those beetle things) at least, for some extra weaponry.

- Navigate carefully through the broken elevator and into the habitat areas.

- After a long trip you will find the experimental barnacle gun. Use it like a grappling hook (or as a bizarre weapon). Just keep in mind that it only works on organic materials. Practice in the next room.

- In the next habitat, fight the creatures but avoid the tentacle-like worms. Treat them like the tentacle from *Half-Life* if you want to grab the goodies from under their reach. Use the barnacle to reach the upper ledge and climb in through the window.

- Move through the vent and use the radio in the next room. You'll hear your squad mates calling for help. Turn off the fan and exit through that vent into the next Chapter.

Chapter 8: Pit Worm's Nest

- This Chapter is the lair of the Pit Worm — a nasty creature that is so powerful it requires a puzzle to kill it (much like the Half-Life tentacle level). Here's how to solve it:

1. Use the barnacle gun to swing over to the pressure switch across from you and to the left. Open the switch and climb down. Move along the walkway to the open doorway.

2. Kill the monsters in there and head over to the control room (it says Valve and Gearbox — a little joke). This button will eventually be used to kill the worm, but not yet. Head through the door marked "Waste Station 3". Run past the worm (stun it with weapons if necessary) and hit the Steam Vent switch here.

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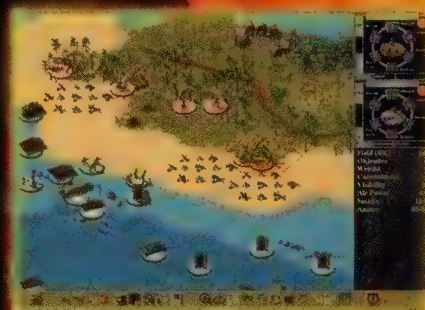
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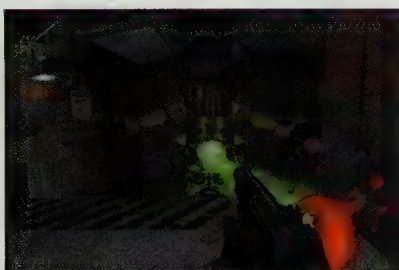
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PIT WORM'S NEST: The creature has a devastating eye attack — avoid it if you know what's good for you!

3. Move across the catwalks to "Waste Station 1" and move through. Navigate the boxes and head into the next hallway. Jump the toxic waste and activate the crusher switch (that room with the boxes will now become a lot narrower). Move back to the box room (now a hallway) and grab the power-ups. Break the floor-vent and drop down. Hit the "Emergency Override" switch and head back to the control room described in Step One.

- Both Valve and Gearbox should be glowing. Hit the switch and watch the worm die! Head back out and climb up to your starting location. Activate the bridge and exit the chapter.

Chapter 9: Foxtrot Uniform

- Your first challenge here is to get past a bunch of organized Black Ops personnel. Use cover wisely, beware their grenades, and take them out quickly. Use a rocket or similar explosive on the machine gun nest, or find a clear shot at the gunner. Next, move through the truck and fight a few more government weasels on the other side. Beware their grenades!

- In the next area you will find a couple of grunts that need your help. A large courtyard filled with crates is your next challenge. It's well covered by snipers. There are also several explosive crates and trip mines. Do not let your men or your fire trip these explosives! The resulting explo-



FOXTROT UNIFORM: Voltigores are very nasty when you get this close to them. Do the smart thing and take them out from afar.

sion will end your mission.

Rush the first two enemies on the ground and take them out fast. Use your sniper rifle to kill the snipers in their towers from afar. Carefully negotiate the traps to find the exit to this area.

- You'll observe a pitched battle between Black Ops and the one-eyed Shocktroopers. Let them tear each other apart and then mop up the survivors. Be sure to grab as many health and ammo power-ups as you can — the next area is not pleasant!

- Descend into the darkness of a sewer pipe that has become the lair of several nasty Voltigores. Because it is pitch black in here, you will have to use your night-vision. There are seven Voltigores hiding in here. Since you won't see them until you are upon them, save often. Stick to your heavy machine gun and a perfect hit from your displacer rifle will completely eliminate a monster (Snarks will keep them busy if necessary). Be careful, avoid their purple discharge, and you should survive this encounter.

- The next area is easier than it seems, unless you are out of heavy weaponry. Your heavy machine gun or regular machine gun is your best bet; you need something with plenty of ammo and a high fire rate. There are two corridors equipped with levers in the room. The idea is to charge the corridors, killing Drones as you go, and then hit the lever to trap the remaining ene-

mies. Each corridor will spit an unlimited number of Pit Drones at you. They are fast and tenacious, so kill them quick and close those doors!

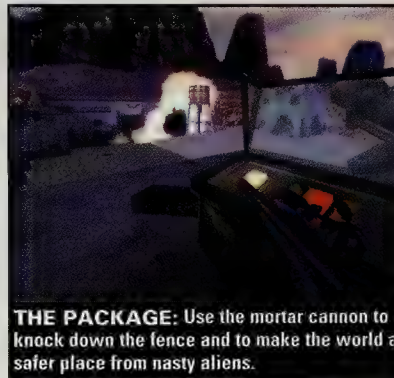
- There is a cave-like hole on one side of the room; yep, more darkness and more Voltigores. Kill them and the three immature offspring, and then move on.

- The next section features a pitched battle against Shock Troopers. Use your three grunts wisely and fight hard all the way through.

- Now you'll come across a familiar looking dam. At its center is a chained down Alien Grunt. Use the barnacle gun to get to the other side (careful, don't fall into the water as it's a pain to get back up there). Destroy the two Shocktroopers who will appear as you reach the other side. Hit the detonator and watch the pretty fireworks as the Grunt and part of the dam go up in flames. Jump into the newly exposed pipe and let the water's current take you to the next Chapter.

Chapter 10: The Package

- More fun with Black Ops is in store. It is best to run ahead of the grunts you'll meet here and take out the opposition quickly. Use the barrels for cover as you approach the mounted gun.



THE PACKAGE: Use the mortar cannon to knock down the fence and to make the world a safer place from nasty aliens.



FOXTROT UNIFORM: The Shocktrooper is tough to kill and as quick-witted as any soldier you're likely to run into.

X *beyond* the frontier

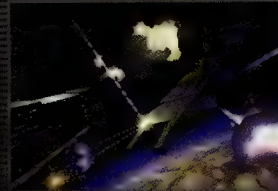
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is the final frontier
now you'll need to take a step
beyond...

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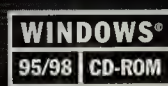


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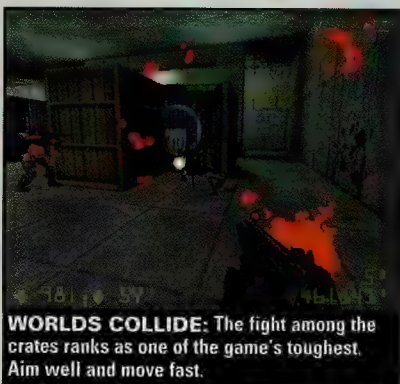
THE PACKAGE: Run, don't walk, toward this cannon. The blast radius of these mortars is devastating.

- The next area features a mortar cannon. It fires slowly but packs a wallop. Order any remaining grunts to hang behind as you rush across the map and shoot the gunner (your men will die if they follow).

- Head into the building, kill the Black Op, and exit. Two more Black Ops will appear, so take them out. Enter the bunker where those two came from. Work your way to the mortar gun and use it to destroy the fence and the aliens that come out.

- The next area features a patrolling helicopter that, if you're patient, will destroy the aliens in the area for you. Of course, once it's done with them, you'll be its next target. Wait a while to make sure it takes out the aliens, and then take it out with a single rocket. Climb up on the roof, climb down to turn off the power, then cross the wire to the other side.

- Now you'll enter the parking garage area. More Black Ops killing fun is in store, but later you'll have to disarm a nuke! First take out all the Black Ops, and then find the guard behind the glass door (he won't let you in because of the bomb). Around the corner you'll find two men working on the bomb. Take them out with the sniper rifle and "use" the bomb to disarm it. The guard will then let you in and you can move on.



WORLDS COLLIDE: The fight among the crates ranks as one of the game's toughest. Aim well and move fast.

Chapter 11: Worlds Collide

- There are two main battles here. Neither of them is puzzle-like or complex, but the combat is intense! In the first area you need to use powerful ammo (like the sniper rifle) to take out and out-manuever several Assassins and Black Ops troopers; easier said than done, so make each shot count! Next, you'll have to take out a nasty machine gun nest. As the crates pass on the conveyor you'll have time to maneuver; it's best to use a rocket.

Move along the conveyor and run around the moving crates until you reach the other side.

- After you run that last gauntlet you come upon a huge, dangerous mess. Two Voltigores and a handful of Shocktroopers are dueling a horde of Black Ops. You are above the action, and

it is best to stay there for a while.

Use explosives and heavy weapons to make your presence felt during the battle. Once the coast seems clear, jump to the first swinging crate, and then to the next. Then jump down to the floor. At about this time, two more Shocktroopers will warp in and three Black Ops will round the corner. You are the pickle in the middle so charge one side and push your way through!

Endgame

- Take the guard's advice and stock up with all kinds of weaponry, then descend down into the darkness. The end boss is coming, and he isn't happy. Fortunately he also isn't as nasty as Nihilanth (the end-boss from *Half-Life*). Taking this guy out is fairly easy if you know what to do.

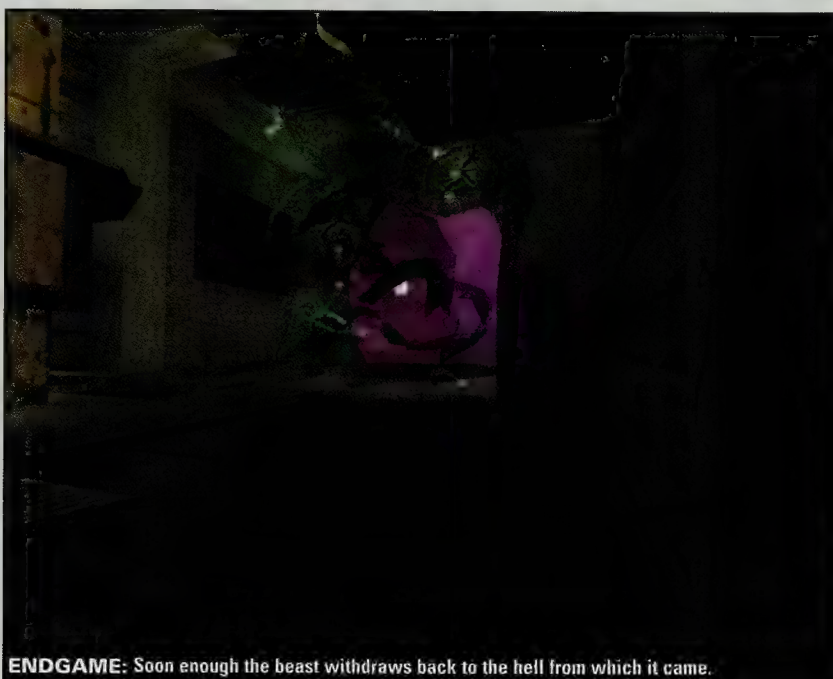
- Environment: This room has a rope and a healing pool. The main room has two mounted lasers, a catwalk, and a ladder. The big pinkish portal will soon be occupied with the final beast, so take a little time to familiarize yourself with your surroundings.

- When the big guy appears, use the laser to take out its eye. Rush across to the second laser and do the same. Climb down and shoot through its open midsection. If you hit, it will rear up. It will also summon a Shocktrooper; kill it and repeat the process once its eyes open again.

- After two successful rounds, the beast will destroy part of the catwalk and you'll have to use the barnacle to cross to the second laser.

- Repeat the process until the creature falls. You will be rewarded with a meeting with the ever-friendly G-Man, but that is something best left for you to experience...we would hate to ruin it for you in these pages!

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ENDGAME: Soon enough the beast withdraws back to the hell from which it came.

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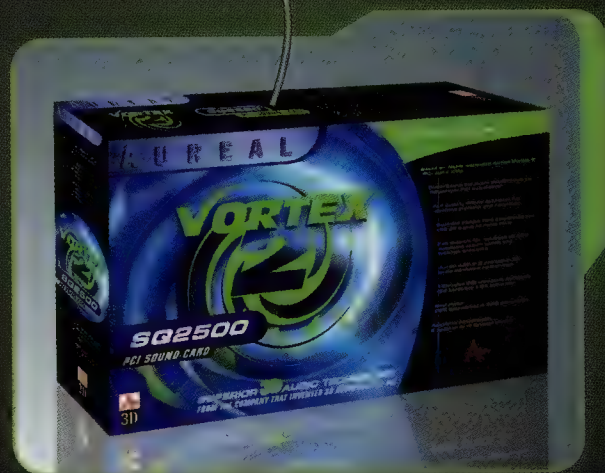


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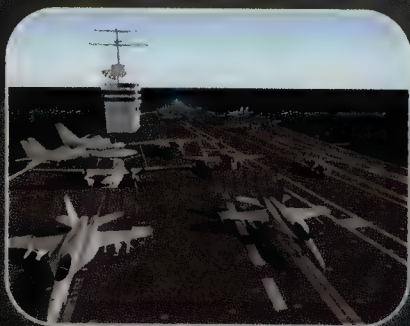


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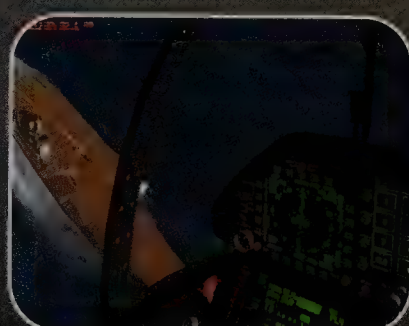
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AGE 18

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

ATTENDS NAVAL TECHNICAL
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AGE 19

TRAINS IN BASIC AND
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Residential Sector

Gang: Redneck

JOB RE1: BLOW JOB!

This mission is a laid-back affair provided you're not already wanted by the cops. First, head north and get the van. Once you're behind the wheel, be careful: too much buffeting will set the explosives off. You'll want to get as far from the blast radius as possible. Get the next truck and proceed cautiously to the barricade. You'll not get much resistance, so stay calm and get the truck into position. Once it blows you should scoot as quickly as possible.

JOB RE2: DOUBLE-CROSS CRUSH!

First, head over to the Zaibatsu territory in the northeast and steal one of their Z-Types. Take it south to Scientist territory and use it to knock off as many Scientists as possible. It's okay if it starts smoking a little, but once the big flames start sprouting from underneath your car's hood, it's time to head back to Zaibatsu territory and grab another. Once you've splattered 50 Scientists, steal a Meteor and do exactly the same thing to the Zaibatsu.

JOB RM1: GREATEST HITS!

At the start of this mission you'll receive some Redneck reinforcements. Pile into the nearest car, and when the assassins turn up, run them over. Once all the assassins have been taken care of you'll be instructed to go and take out Flambo Cortex. Grab a sturdy car and pay a visit to the nearby bomb shop. Head to the station and park it next to Flambo's limo, making sure you start the timer before you get out. The blast might not take out all of Flambo's bodyguards, so either prepare to defend yourself from them or run away — quickly.



JOB RM1: The blast from your car bomb may not take out all of Flambo's bodyguards, so get ready to defend yourself or run away quickly.



JOB RM2: When you steal this tank the only thing you really need to worry about are the tanks that the army sends after you.

JOB RM2: TANKS-GIVING!

Start off by getting a car rigged with a bomb, and then take it down to the southern entrance of the army base. Detonate it, and the gate will open up. Your best bet here is to get another car to drive around the base with, as those soldiers are extremely tough. Once you've reached the tank, get in and start motoring. The army's tanks are your main worry, so stay to the back roads and keep out of their way as much as possible.

JOB RM3: BENSON BURNER!

Zoom off and grab the Benson. Take it to the bomb shop, then the crane, and then drive around until you find a truck cab. Take this to the trailer, connect them, then drive around to the crane and it'll drop the Benson. Take this (extremely carefully) to the cop, and your mission is a success. Simple!

JOB RH1: GANG CAR BANG!

This mission can be rather tricky, especially if you come unprepared. You'll want as many weapons as you can get, and perhaps a car with machine-guns fitted. It also

helps if you know the locations of the garages in the area.

JOB RH2: PENAL TIES!

Drive to the pick-up point, get in the car, and you'll get arrested. In prison, find your contact, and then pick up the uniform and machine gun. Find a guard and start blasting. Once all the guards are dead, find and destroy the locks. Once that's done, get into a car, jump the bridge, and head home.



JOB RH2: You get arrested at the beginning of this level. You'll have to find your contact to get a uniform and a machine gun so that you can break out of jail. Once you're out, find a car and head to freedom.

Gang: Scientist**JOB SE1: SINK OR SWIM!**

This mission poses little difficulty unless the cops are chasing you. All you have to do is steal a taxi, pick up the enemy agents, and take them to the crane.

JOB SE2: FAKE TRUCE!

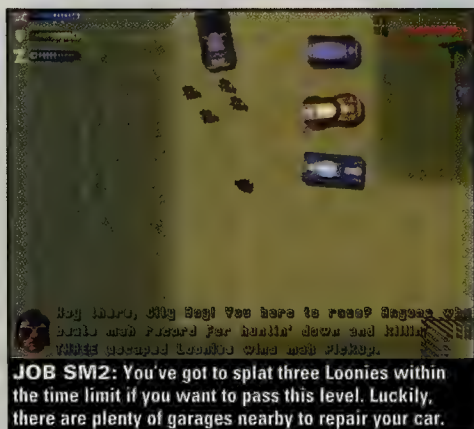
Get the bus, pick up the Rednecks and Zaibatsu, and take them to the Scientist research center. A low respect rating with one of the gangs means that you'll constantly get shot at in their territory, making this mission much trickier.

JOB SM1: LABRAT'S PLAN!

Find a big vehicle to take your posse to the Zaibatsu; it's a good idea to power it up with machine guns. Make sure you get out of there before it explodes, though.

JOB SM2: GRAN'PA WE LOVE YOU!

To win the pick-up you've got to splat three escaped Loonies and get back to the starting point within the time limit.



JOB SM2: You've got to splat three Loonies within the time limit if you want to pass this level. Luckily, there are plenty of garages nearby to repair your car.



JOB ZE2: In this mission, you'll have to kill a bunch of cops in order to steal a cop car. After that you need to get your hands on a flame thrower and take out a whole gaggle of Rednecks. Can you say barbecue?

Use nearby garages to repair your car and to keep the cops off your trail. Once you've got the pick-up, head over to your old Gran'pa. You'll be chased by Rednecks on your way back to base, but their attacks are feeble.

JOB SM3: REDNECK ATTACK!

Get a (preferably machine gun-equipped) tough car and just rampage around trying to slaughter as many Rednecks as possible. Survive until the end of the time limit and you win.

JOB SH1: TAXI TRAITOR TEST!

Just one bit of advice here: make sure you don't fall in the pool!

JOB SH2: WATER CARRY ON!

Take the Scientist clones and find yourself a nice bank van. Once everyone is inside, travel up to the Zaibatsu HQ and head for H2000 Water. Find the generator (it's at the end of the long path near the big "H2000 Water" sign) and blow it up. Get back to the H2000 sign to finish the last Scientist mission.

Gang: Zaibatsu**JOB ZE1: SCIENCE FRICTION!**

Grab a tough car and head west over the huge bridge into the heart of the Redneck base. When you find the building with the pick-up, take the guards out any way you can. Grab their Molotovs, and then get into the pick-up and head down to the Scientist base. Use the Molotov cocktails to blow up the gate lock. Park the van, set the bomb, and hightail it out of there.

JOB ZE2: FIRE TRUCK FUN!

Get some police on your tail, and then find a garage. Get out, kill the police



JOB ZM1: Get ready for a tough level if the Rednecks hate you. Kill some Scientists first so you can curry their favor.

when they come to get you, then get back in your car and get it re-sprayed. Now you're free to steal one of the cop cars without being chased by the fuzz. Find the security van and nudge it a bit. When the guy gets out, kill him and "borrow" his van. Take it back to Zaibatsu HQ, then go and find a fire truck. There's one a few blocks south of the Zaibatsu base, so grab it and take it back to be fitted with the flamethrower. Killing the 30 Rednecks is reasonably easy as long as you don't blow up too many nearby vehicles.

JOB ZM1: OPERATION Z!

For the first vehicle, get something strong like a truck, and arm it with machine guns. Blast the pick-up's guards and take it back to HQ. The next one is a piece of cake. The third is a total nightmare if the Rednecks hate you, so make sure you go and kill a few Scientists first. Once that's done, take the bridge from Zaibatsu territory to Redneck territory, and drop down into the area with the limo in it. To escape you need to jump out using the ramp from the south. The final vehicle is no problem as long as you're patient. Grab a truck cab and make your way to the police station. Take the trailer to the crane as carefully as you can, then drive the cop car to Zaibatsu HQ.

JOB ZM2:**LAW ENFORCEMENT LARCENY!**

This mission requires you to steal a SWAT van, and then a special agent car. The easiest way is to hang around a garage, causing mayhem until the required vehicle turns up, and then eliminating the vehicle's occupants. Get a re-spray and take your prize home.



JOB ZM2: Stealing a SWAT van is no easy task. The only way to do it is by killing every SWAT guy you see. Easier said than done.

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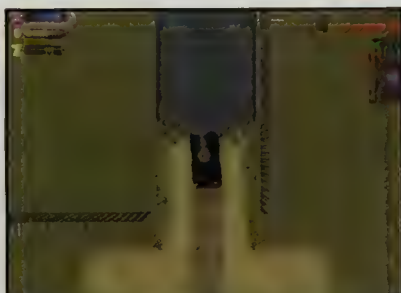
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JOB ZM3: You start this level off with a nice limo ride. After that you're going to need to do a lot of jumping to reach the generators.

JOB ZM3: VALDEZ ALERT!

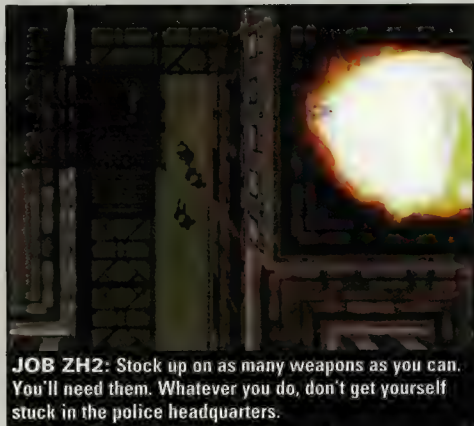
Get a limo to transport you and your crew. Head over to the crane part of the Zaibatsu HQ (it's on the eastern edge of the map) and find the ramp. Reverse, then slam on the gas — if you get up enough speed you should find yourself sailing onto the roof of the next building. Keep going until you smash through the wall of the Scientist research center, then get everyone out of the car and find the two generators. The north-most one requires some box jumping to reach (you need to jump over the gate to the west of the railway line), but the other one is east to get to. Once they're destroyed, exit via the hole you came in by and the mission is complete.

JOB ZH1: MURDER IN THE MALL!

Once again grab a limo (and as many heavy weapons as you can lay your hands on), and head to your destination. You've got to kill a whopping 100 Scientists without using any vehicles, which is nightmarish by anyone's standards. For the best chance, kill Zaibatsu until you reach maximum respect, and find the body armor and health bonus points before you start shooting.

JOB ZH2: DISTRACTION ACTION!

Get as many weapons as you can and head over to your first destination. Head up the stairs, killing the cops as you go, making sure you grab the invincibility pill. Work your way around to the western walkway where you can hit the generator, then run over to the truck. Don't get caught in the police HQ — get out of the southern entrance as quickly as possible. Just keep driving, and you should survive until the time runs out.



JOB ZH2: Stock up on as many weapons as you can. You'll need them. Whatever you do, don't get yourself stuck in the police headquarters.



JOB ZE2: You'll find yourself in the heart of the Redneck base in this mission. Be sure you grab the Molotovs off of all the guards you take out, you'll need them to blow up the gate lock and set your bomb.

Industrial Sector

Gang: Russian Mafia

JOB RE1: MMM, RUSSIAN SAILORS!

Patience is everything in this mission. You won't get hassled at all unless you get the cops involved, so take it slow and try not to run anyone over. Once you've got all four dealers, take them to the crane.

JOB RE2: HOT DOG HOMICIDE!

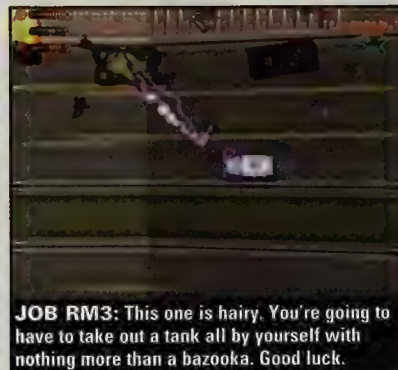
Your first task is to find a bus stop. Once there, wait for a bus to arrive and hijack it. Wait right by the bus stop until enough people have gotten onto the bus you just took. Head for the meat processing plant. Finally, take the hot dog van across town.

JOB RM1: OFFICER DOWN!

You'd better get toolled up before you start this mission, as it involves an awful lot of shooting. A tough car with machine guns would be good for a start, as not only do you have to take out the two cop cars mentioned in the briefing, but also a SWAT van and two special agent cars. Make sure you get the rocket launcher before you start taking out the cops.

JOB RM2: KARMA ASSASSINS!

The first thing you have to deal with in this mission is a Krishna assault, which involves several assassins attacking you one by one. Once they're gone, arm your car with plenty of explosives and head off to finish the hard-ass assassin. Run over his chums, and then detonate your car next to his bus. That should take care of him!



JOB RM3: This one is hairy. You're going to have to take out a tank all by yourself with nothing more than a bazooka. Good luck.

JOB RM3: TANKS A LOT!

Grab the rockets to the west of the phones and pick up a fast car. Head as quickly as you can to the tanks. Run over the soldiers, and then abandon your car to the west and run straight for the tanks. If you manage to dodge their rockets, you can head around to where the back of the turret is and shoot it with your bazooka. Then, as the turret turns toward you, you can jump over the tank and do the same thing again.

JOB RH1: VEDIC MASSACRE!

Find and steal a big vehicle and head over to the guerrillas. Once they're all aboard, head off for the Krishna temple. Waste Krishnas left, right, and center, remembering to make full use of any power-ups. Once the timer starts, head for a walkway or somewhere else that lets you hide from Krishna attacks.

JOB RH2: SUPER GRASS RESCUE!

Find a large car and head for the Zaibatsu power core where your friends are waiting. Blow up the generators with the provided rocket launcher or Molotov cocktails, meet up with your chums, and

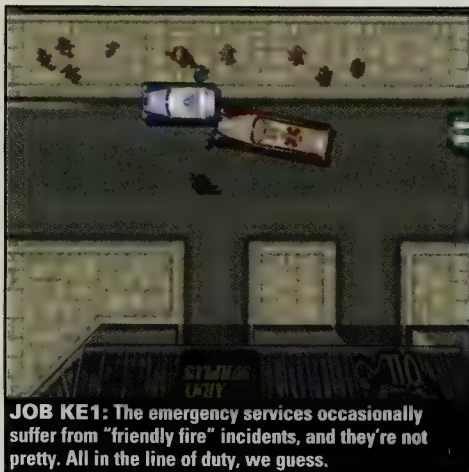


then head for the gate. You'll be attacked by three assassins, but they're nothing special. Head back to the base to meet your contact, then steal a cop car. You'll want to visit a garage before continuing, as it's important not to be harassed by the real cops during the next bit. Find the informant's car and flag him down using your cop car's siren. When he makes a break for it, chase after him and smack him up real good, then take him to Jerkov's son to be grilled.

Gang: Krishna

JOB KE1: COP CAR SCRAPI

Start off by stealing a cop car, and then take it to the crane. Don't worry about getting a re-spray — it's actually better if the cops come after you as you've got to crush a few more cars. Once Sunbeam is satisfied with your work, you've completed the job.



JOB KE2: DECONSTRUCTION YARD!

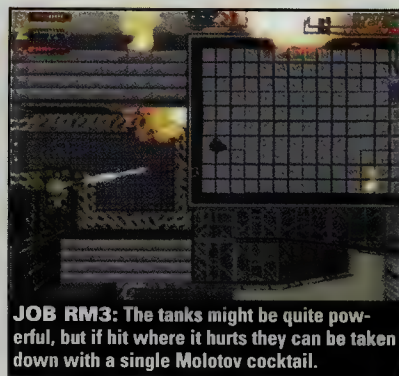
Head down to the construction yard and you'll be informed you need Leo the Locksmith. Find him in Russian Mafia territory, and blow up the generator he's trying to hit with Molotov cocktails. He'll follow you, so take him down to the gate. Once he's opened it, enter the construction yard and kill the construction manager. All that's left to do now is destroy the parked Zaibatsu truck located nearby.

JOB KM1: SUNBEAM CONTRACT!

Go and pick up the Krishnas in some sort of large vehicle, then head over to Russian Mafia territory. You've got to kill a few Russians to bring each wave of assassins out, so go crazy. The assassins are fairly easy to take down, but aim carefully to avoid the unwanted attentions of the authorities.

JOB KM2: COSSACK CONVERSION!

You shouldn't have too many problems with this mission as long as you don't drive like a maniac and come well-equipped. The first part involves stealing a Russian Mafia truck. It's extremely



well-guarded, so drive your car through the machine gun shop and try to kill as many of them as you can with it before it explodes. Once you've got the truck, everything should be pretty smooth. Don't be afraid to get it re-sprayed if there are police on your tail. Once you have picked up the defectors and taken them to the conversion house, the mission is over.

JOB KM3: CONVERSION EVASION!

Find a Krishna bus and head on over to the Zaibatsu base where the Krishnas are being held. Don't take on the tanks yet; instead leave the bus outside and run past them as quickly as possible until you're inside. To destroy the tanks, find the three generators and destroy them; this cuts the tanks' power and makes them blow up. Now return to the bus and pick the Krishnas up in it. Take it home carefully to win the mission.

JOB KH1: ROOFTOP RESCUE!

If you go about this mission the right way, it's easy — if not, you'll be tearing your hair out. First, make sure you're good chums with the Zaibatsu so they don't shoot at you more than absolutely necessary. Head over to the building where the Krishnas are being held, then go a block north and climb the stairs and head over the walkway south. This will lead you onto the roof of the Zaibatsu building. Shoot the guards and jump over the gaps to collect the Molotov cocktail. Once you've got it, destroy the three generators, then drop down and follow the Krishna. When you see the row of four Zaibatsu, use your Molotovs to take them out, but try and avoid hitting the vans behind them. Get down to the vans and move the middle one so it doesn't block the road. Now head over to your limo and slowly lead the Krishna limo back to base. If the cops and Zaibatsu are both cool with you, it's easy.

JOB KH2: POWER STATION!

Get a van, pick up your buddies, and head off to the power station. All you need to do is assassinate the four easy-to-find sitting guards and set bombs by their remains. Once you're done, head up to the tower to watch the fireworks.

Gang: Zaibatsu

JOB ZE1: GRAND THEFT AUTO!

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JOB ZE1: You'll need to use this jump to get the third car home to finish this level.

Russian. If you avoid the westerly passage, you should get all the vehicles back to the power station in one piece.

JOB ZE2: IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!

Don't get too far away from the Russian van — everything else is as easy as pie.

JOB ZM1: LOCK-OUT!

The first thing to do in this mission is check out the lock-up where the van is being held. If you've got grenades or Molotovs, then take out the Russian mafia guy on the catwalk; if not, make a note to pick some up. After you've checked out the front and back door, head south to pick up Satchmo the Safecracker, who'll open the back door. He'll get blown up, so you'll need to go get a Kovski Bulwark (the car the Russian Mafia use, in case you're confused). This will let you get through the second door. Now, get some speed going and jump over the water using the huge ramp. Naturally, take out any guards you encounter. Before you can get the truck out of the front door you'll need to destroy the two generators. Molotov cocktail-tossing guards are all over the place, so blast them. Use their discarded Molotovs to blow the genera-



JOB ZM2: This is the alley that gives you access to the train tracks.

tors up, then escape in the truck. You'll get chased by Russians in unmarked cars, but don't stop to fight — just head for the safe house. If the truck makes it back in one piece, you've done good.

JOB ZM2: PAYBACK!

The first part of this mission is pretty damn easy — just roll around town sorting out the drug deals. However, when you're asked to take revenge on the Russian Mafia for a broken deal, things get tougher. How exactly do you get to that truck for a start? Travel south from the front gate, then head east between the yellow and black walls. Now follow the train line north. You'll need to

actually go through the train's tunnel, so make sure it's just gone by when you do this or you might get run over. Once you're through to the station, take the catwalk west and deck the Russian forces. Blow up the generator with a Molotov cocktail and you're free to drive the truck home relatively hassle free.

JOB ZM3: GANG WAR!

Time for, sigh, another "running over people" mission. Fifty Krishnas and Russian Mafia have to be crushed, and the drill is much the same as before, except it takes ages to accomplish. Butter up the side you're going to be running over by killing their least favorite gang, as this means they're going to take longer to start shooting at you. You'll probably have to change vehicles a couple of times, so use the garage just to the south of the Krishna base.

JOB ZH1: I'D LIKE A TANK PLEASE BOB!

This is pretty much the ultimate GTA2 challenge: steal a tank. You've got to get a SWAT van and a special agent car first, but that should be old stuff to you by now. Hang around the garage with a car ready to be re-sprayed. When the tanks arrive, get into one, and then quickly jump out again and get the car re-sprayed. You can now pick up the tank and deliver it to your boss at your leisure.

JOB ZH2: ARMY BASE ALERT!

Now you've got to steal a tank from right under the army's nose using just your wits, cunning, and hopefully a selection of explosives. Use rockets to destroy the tanks, and watch out for soldiers, too. When you get to the tank, the alarm sounds and the army starts spilling onto the streets. It's tempting to use a jeep to get to the nearest garage, but whatever tactic you decide on you're going to be in for one hell of a time. Good luck...you're gonna need it.

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JOB ZM1: You've got to jump over these boxes to reach the second generator.

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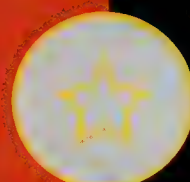
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The Final Word on Game Violence and Ads

I just finished reading your response to Greg Potter's letter in the December 1999 issue, and while I understand your position and agree that games should not be censored, I don't agree with your ultimate conclusion of turning the other cheek.

I suppose by now you've read about the shooting in the shopping mall in San Paolo, Brazil. Basically, some young "adult" played out a level of *Duke Nukem* in a theater. What really stuck out in my mind about this was that he fired a single shot into a bathroom mirror to see if there were any hidden goodies. I used to be of the opinion that games shouldn't be banned any more than books or television shows, but now I'm not so sure. I'm beginning to think that the more graphically realistic games become, the less able our "reality-challenged" members of society will be to distinguish game from reality.

What distinguishes games from movies is that in movies, the director, not the viewer, dictates the camera angles. Books of course do not display activities pictorially, so it's up to the reader's mind to visualize such behavior. Games, on the other hand, allow players to even customize a level to the point where they could have a room full of weapons, innocent civilians, and no means of escape.

Sorry to be so cheap by not providing an answer of my own, other than to say the gaming industry should put some thought into what might happen and who might play these games. But I'm not in the industry, and I don't want to dictate what kind of games people should or should not make. My primary goal in writing this letter is to state that saying "if you don't like it, don't buy it" does seem rather cavalier. After all, not buying *Duke Nukem* didn't save the lives of the people sitting in that theater in Brazil.

—Curtis Tom, via the Internet

Thanks for your comments Curtis. Our response of "if you don't like, don't buy it" was directed at those that share Mr. Potter's views that some games go over the top when it comes to portraying violent and gory content. It's exactly the same response we would give to someone who complained that they didn't like strategy games which contained a lot of micro-managing of units.

Saying that games will have more of an effect on an already deranged person than a

similarly themed movie or book (or song, or voice in their head, etc.) is pure conjecture. In fact, one could argue that by giving this on-the-edge person a release for his aggression and an outlet for his demented ideas by playing through or designing a level in a game, it could help to save lives. Sounds silly? Maybe, but no more so than saying that a videogame is the sole reason for someone going on a killing spree.

The bottom line is that there are people in this world that just aren't right in the head. To blame any form of media for this just doesn't make any sense. There have been crazy folks doing very bad things to other people long before videogames, movies, or even the printed word was invented.

I thought you published two exceptionally well expressed, thoughtful, non-confrontational letters on the topic of PC game gore in the December issue; thanks for that.

However, your first response left a lot to be desired. You demonstrate a blind spot when it comes to excessive violence

in games. When you imply that you won't criticize anyone for any position on violence that they take, either it means that you are unwilling to stand up for your own convictions or you have double standards that you don't want to disclose. For

example, would you criticize violence directed at a specific sociological or ethnic group, or is violence okay as long as its targets are non-specific?

Greg Potter made a point that you simply ignored: the escalation of game graphic violence is going to draw a political response just as it did with comic books. You may think that because these are

merely "games", nothing should or will be done about them, but that is simply putting your head in the sand. The issue is not one of adults exercising reasonable choices, but of minors buying and immersing themselves in games that glorify not merely violence, but the depersonalization of other human beings.

I was also very disappointed with your evasive, legalistic reply to Russell

There have been crazy folks doing very bad things to other people long before videogames, movies, or even the printed word was invented.



Could ridding the world of games like *Duke Nukem 3D* solve all of our problems? Ah, if only it were that simple.

Ida. Again, you have in effect said that you don't have any standards because you don't think that you can meet everyone's expectations. That's a cop-out. You have journalistic standards and you try to meet everyone's expectations for game reviews, don't you?

By staying away from the area of advertising content in the magazine, all you've done is pull the old three monkeys bit — see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil. Furthermore, one could easily interpret the latter part of your answer to mean that *PC Gamer* has never rejected an advertisement for content (which I suspect is exactly the case). I agree with Ida that not more than one or two ads per issue are objectionable; if the number of objectionable ads were 20 to 30, you would likely be losing subscribers.

PC Gamer is a good book, overall, and you needn't be so defensive about having your warts pointed out. I've been a subscriber for over five years and I believe that your game reviews are consistently the best in the business. When you are the best, you should expect to take a little heat when you show some weakness. Your readers don't expect you to cover for the industry that goes in games is only "pretend." This is a serious issue and it deserves airing. The answers are not easy but that doesn't mean that the questions should be dismissed with a wave of the hand.

—Roger F. Jones, Broomall, PA

Great letter Roger. We'll respond to your points in the order you raised them.

We are definitely standing up for our convictions when we say that people are free to create, play, enjoy, dislike, loathe, or be indifferent toward games or anything else. It's called freedom of choice, and it's something we all agree on here. As for violence against certain groups of people, games have taken on this subject many times. An obvious example is *Wolfenstein 3D*, but nobody was shedding any tears over the butchering of Nazis, so that was accepted. And though they don't have the immediacy of a first-person shooter, flight simulators and wargames have always

dealt with the destruction of various races, cultures, and countries. Just because the death-dealing is done more abstractly, should that make it any more acceptable?

We understand that there are politicians who would love to hang their hat on the banning of videogames, and our industry has taken steps to prevent children from having access to mature-themed games. The ESRB codes, if used properly, should be just as effective as the restrictions used to prevent minors from acquiring adult oriented material that appears in other forms of entertainment.

We never said or implied that we don't have advertising standards because we don't feel we can meet everyone's expectations —

we said our standards may not be the same as yours or some other readers that may be more easily offended by something. Just as you or some others may feel that "one or two" advertisements per issue are offensive, the people in charge of the ad content in the magazine don't see it the same way. We spoke with our advertising director, Karen Quilantang, to clarify this subject once and for all. She told us that yes, there have been instances where ads have been rejected. What usually happens is that several people in the department will look at the ad, and if anyone finds it objectionable, the company that placed the ad will be notified and asked to make adjustments or resubmit a new one. As we previously stated, we editorial "monkeys" have no control over the ad content, but to accuse the magazine of not having any standards as far as ad content is concerned is incorrect.

We don't have a problem taking heat, but we're going to defend ourselves when we think we're wrongly accused of something. And we're not "covering" for anybody — just giving you our honest opinions. We agree that the issue needs to be addressed, which is why we've devoted the space we have to it these past months. Now, let's move on.

bleem!

Getting to the Bottom of bleem!

I believe I know the source for the name of the PlayStation emulator called "bleem!" I heard the word once before in an old "Happy Days" episode that introduced Robin Williams as Mork from Ork. Mork wanted to take Richie Cunningham to Ork and said it would only take a "bleem" to get there and back to earth. When Richie Cunningham asked how long a "bleem" would take, Mork replied, "About ten thousand years." So, a bleem is an Orkan measurement of a unit of time.

—Roy Dunigan via the Internet

I have seen several letters in your magazine speculating on what bleem! stands for. According to one of the company's early web pages, it stands for the "Best Little Emulator Ever Made". I hope this helps.

—John Bibby, via the Internet

Randy? Dave? Can we get a yay or nay here?

Striking Gold

I am so glad that you started including the *Gone Gold* release list in your magazine. I had always picked up a competitor's magazine so I could have (tentative, theoretical, or pipe-dream) release dates, but now I can find more accurate information in my favorite gaming magazine. I am



If you want to know when new games hit the shelves, the first place to look is *Gone Gold*, the best site on the 'Net for new release information.

very happy that you added it and now visit the site daily. I rarely even write letters to the editor (two that I can think of in 27 years, including this one), but Rich's site is so good I felt I needed to.

Also, since I am writing, I think you guys are doing the best job out there. I love the expanded articles, increased number of previews, and the *PC Gamer* Recommends section. In summation, keep up the good work and give more space to *Gone Gold* — it really deserves it.

—Jason Johnston, via the Internet

Glad you're enjoying the magazine even more now Jason. We think our Release Meter is a very useful tool for gamers, providing the most accurate release information available, and we're happy to hear that many of you are benefiting from its inclusion. We're also fans of the *Gone Gold* website, and Rich LaPorte and his staff do an outstanding job. For those that haven't visited the site yet, be sure to check it out at www.gonegold.com.

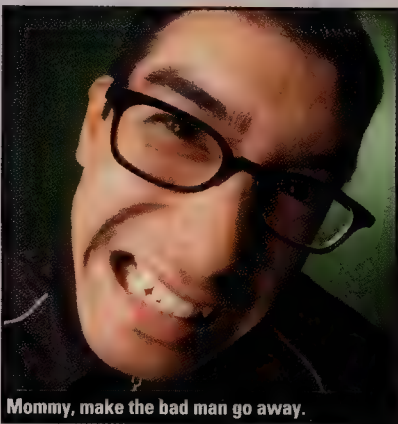
A Fan of the Jackal

Don't let these nerds discourage you, Jay. You work at a magazine that reviews products, and as a critic, not only can you review games but people as well. Deep down, what the others don't see is that you are trying to help people by telling them their flaws. They just don't realize it. I do the same thing. Otherwise, how are the many and varied idiots out there going to know they're idiots? People like us have to tell them. Keep up the sadistic, er, good work.

—Alex Segall, via the Internet

P.S. Lob a couple of spitballs at Whitta for me. Thanks!

The Jackal Responds: Is this some pathetic attempt to get on my good side? Well, forget it, punk — I don't have a good side! Despite your patronizing letter, I will honor your spitball request.



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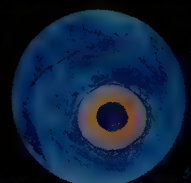
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He's LucasArts' resident adventure game maven, the tricked-out mind behind such classics as Day of the Tentacle, Full Throttle, and Grim Fandango. What drives this fevered imagination? Well, it's time to find out as we meet...

TIM SCHAFER

How the devil are you?

I'm fine. Now, who the hell is this and why are you calling so early?

What was the first game you ever played?

FIRST EVER: Space Race arcade game — they had one in the lodge at summer camp.

FIRST CONSOLE: Air Sea Battle on the Atari 2600 at a Payless drug store photo counter.

FIRST COMPUTER GAME:

Backgammon on a TRS-80 at Radio Shack.

FIRST COMPUTER GAME I ACTUALLY OWNED: Star Raiders on the Atari 400.

How did you get into the games industry?

It was easier back then. Standards were lower.

What's the worst game you've ever been involved in making?

I didn't work on Night Shift, but then again, I didn't really try that hard to stop it.

What's the best game you've played recently?

The last PC game I really got into was Half-Life. But then it won so many awards at the Game Developer's Conference, I decided I didn't like it any more. Now I'm pretty heavily into Snowcraft.

And the worst?

You know, I don't play a game if it even looks like it might be bad. If the ad-art is cheesy, if the package smells funny, then it's out. I usually wait until a million people recommend a game to me, and then I'll play it. Life's too short to play bad games.

What's the greatest moment in the history of gaming?

The day Deer Hunter became a hit. I remember because we were all running up and down the aisles, cheering, "Yay! Games don't have to be good any more!"

Have you ever been arrested?

Yeah, that's a funny story, actually.

What are you like when you're drunk?

Funnier, more attractive, and for some reason, I can suddenly play the piano.

If there was one thing about the games business that you could smite with one mighty blow, what would it be?

Well there's a guy down the hall from me who's

blasting Bon Jovi music. He can go.

Sausage: patties or links?

I prefer links because they fit in your ears better.

Violence in gaming: legitimate concern or media hysteria?

Actually, I think a lot of game developers are pretty irresponsible about their content. But I'm not in favor of banning it, or restricting it. I just don't want to be a part of it. Of course, an old man gets beaten to death with a cane in Full Throttle, so who am I to talk?

Did playing Doom ever make you want to kill anybody?

Yes, but after I killed them, the feeling went away.

Pick five words to describe yourself.

Five foot ten dark hair.

What are you most likely to complain about in a hotel?

When they kick me out of the pool just because I'm not a guest.

What do you have in your pockets right now?

Bloody teeth, strips of flannel, Tic-Tacs.

What's your most unpleasant characteristic?

Back hair.

What music do you want played at your funeral?

I want someone to play the "Temple of Time" theme from Zelda 64 on an ocarina, just before my coffin disappears in a shaft of blue light. Either that, or "Crazy Train."

Online gaming: over-rated fad or inevitable future?

I don't know. I've never tried it, but that's because I don't like other people.

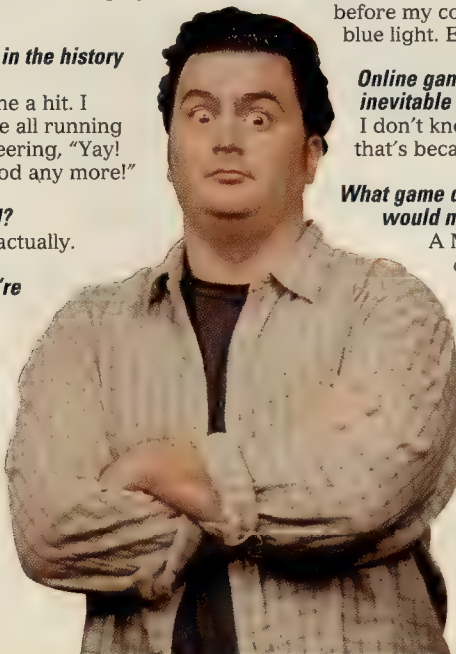
What game do you really wish somebody would make?

A Mac version of Grim Fandango. Wait, these questions are for MacAddict, right?

Where are you off to now?

I'm going to sit right here and get back to work on this fabulous new game so that all the children and the young at heart will have something to enjoy and challenge their... Ah, screw it. I'm going home early, while there's still time to enjoy the hot weather.

PCG



FEBRUARY 2000

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My fondest childhood memories are those of my trusted super-robo-auto-rooter. My parents never understood what a boy would want with a super-robo-auto-rooter, but then again, my parents never understood much at all. All I cared about was the fact that I had a super-robo-auto-rooter all to myself.

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Unfortunately, no one ever understood my love for the super-robo-auto-rooter. Not even my wife. I tried to hide it from her at first, but one fateful night she heard me playing with my super-robo-auto-rooter in the bathroom. Things would never be the same after that.

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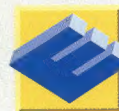
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